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NEGOTIATING THE 1973 PARIS PEACE ACCORDS:
A CASE STUDY IN CONFLICT TERMINATION

by

J. Robert Nicholson

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Political Science
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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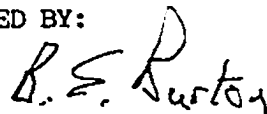
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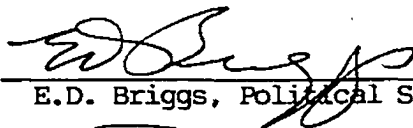
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ABSTRACT

When Richard Nixon took the oath of office as the thirty-seventh President of the United States on January 20, 1969, his Administration faced a foreign policy disaster in Vietnam. President Nixon, as well as his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, recognized that American disengagement from Vietnam was of the highest strategic priority. As long as the United States remained involved in the quagmire of Vietnam, the country could not exercise its role as the leader of the West on the world stage. Vital foreign policy matters, such as Soviet-American *détente* and Sino-American rapprochement, would remain atrophied. Thus, all ranking members of the Nixon Administration realized that a successful conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks had to be Washington's principal concern.

The purpose of this study is to provide a critical analysis of the Paris Peace Talks and the dynamics that led to the settlement of the Paris Peace Accords. Two hypotheses will be put forward and addressed: Only a fundamental shift in the negotiating position of Hanoi by October of 1972 allowed the Paris Peace Talks to be eventually settled in January of 1973, and second, the Nixon administration was compelled to accept a settlement because of strong domestic anti-war sentiment, especially in the Congress and business community. In order to address the two key hypotheses that are central to

iii.

this study, an analytical framework will be put forward.

In the literature review, it will be clearly demonstrated that there is no existing comprehensive analytical framework to address a topic of such importance. Instead, most of the literature was found to focus on the foreign policy process which led the United States into the quagmire of Vietnam, the actual progress of the war itself once the huge American military build-up began in 1965, and the nature and internal dynamics of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam(DRV). So, an analytical framework will be created using the theoretical works on conflict resolution.

Three dominant themes can be found in the theoretical literature on conflict resolution. These themes, military stalemate/military reversal, the threat of domestic instability, and the international balance of power, are directly applicable to the Paris Peace Talks. By reference to these three factors, to be called "catalysts" in this study, the two hypotheses will be addressed. The three catalysts will also address four inter-related questions that are directly related to the hypotheses: What were the factors that led the respective parties to enter into the Paris Peace Talks in November of 1968, and subsequently, to conclude the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973?; Why did the Paris Peace Talks drag on for so long? Why did the United States accept a peace settlement which from the Perspective of South Vietnamese President Thieu(1967-1975) was not in Saigon's

interests?, and finally, Why did Hanoi accept a peace settlement that apparently thwarted its two long-term objectives: reunification of Vietnam and Vietnamese hegemony in South-East Asia?

These vital issues will be addressed by applying the analytical framework to four "historical snapshots." These four snapshots have been isolated because their influence on the Paris Peace Talks was vital. The four snapshots are as follows: the Communist Tet Offensive, the decision made by President Johnson to begin deescalation of the war by entering into peace talks in March of 1968, the American and South Vietnamese incursions into Cambodia and Laos in April of 1970 and February of 1971, respectively, and the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive of March of 1972. The framework developed for this study will succeed in clarifying many of the most controversial aspects of the Second Vietnam War in general and the Paris Peace Talks in particular.

THIS STUDY IS DEDICATED TO MY TWO COUSINS WHO FOUGHT FOR
LIBERTY IN VIETNAM, BRIGADIER-GENERAL RANDOLPH FIOLO, (USMC-
RETIRED), AND COLONEL GEORGE LINDSEY, (USA-ACTIVE SERVICE).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, John and Elizabeth, for their strong love and devotion, which were invaluable to me at both the under-graduate and graduate levels.

Equally important, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the members of my committee.

Without the assistance, guidance, patience, and encouragement provided by my supervisor, Professor Bruce E. Burton from the Department of Political Science, this study would not have been possible. Professor Burton, more than any other individual, was responsible for the completion of this work.

The contribution made by the second reader, Dr.E. Donald Briggs, was also invaluable. Professor Briggs' sharp analytical mind was indispensable in the completion of this work. I would like to thank Professor Briggs in particular for the assistance he provided me in establishing the theoretical framework.

The third reader on my committee, Dr. Ian C.Pemberton from the Department of History, also played a key role. I would especially like to thank Dr. Pemberton for providing invaluable insight into the decision-making process of the Nixon Administration(1969-1974).

I would also like to extend my gratitude to a fourth professor despite the fact that this individual was not a member of my academic committee. Professor Martha F. Lee from the Department of Political Science provided invaluable encouragement to me with her understanding nature and sense of humour. Working for her as a teaching assistant for three semesters was both an honour and a pleasure.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to all of my fellow graduates who began their studies in September of 1992. Above all, I would like to thank my good friend Gurbeen Bhasin for all of her encouragement.

Two other friends of mine that also deserve mention are Lance Meredith and Brent Fieldus.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for the

insights provided by my many friends in the military of the United States. In particular, I would like to thank the personnel of the 10th Special Forces Group(Airborne), Fort Devens, Massachusetts; the 2nd Marine Division, Camp LeJeune, North Carolina; the 2nd Marine Air Wing, Cherry Point, North Carolina; the 2nd Carrier Division(USS SARATOGA), Norfolk, Virginia; the 4th Carrier Division(USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT, and USS GEORGE WASHINGTON), Norfolk, Virginia, and the 2nd Cruiser-Destroyer Division(USS PHILIPPINE SEA), Charleston, South Carolina. Ultimately, this paper was written for each and every one of you.

The maps in the pocket in the back of the thesis appear courtesy of the United States Marine Corps' Historical Archives Centre, Quantico, Virginia.

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Map I: South-East Asia
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A LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARVN.....	Army of the Republic of Vietnam.
CCP.....	Chinese Communist Party.
CIA.....	Central Intelligence Agency.
COSVN.....	Central Office for South Vietnam.
CPSU.....	Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
DMZ.....	Demilitarized Zone.
DRV.....	Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
FBI.....	Federal Bureau of Investigation.
II FFV.....	II Field Force Vietnam.
ICCS.....	International Commission for Control and Supervision.
JMC.....	Joint Military Commission.
MACV.....	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.
PAVN.....	People's Army of Vietnam.
PLA.....	People's Liberation Army.
PRC.....	People's Republic of China.
UN.....	United Nations.
USA.....	United States Army.

USAF..... United States Air Force

USMC..... United States Marine Corps.

USSR..... Union of Soviet
Socialist Republics.

VC..... Viet Cong.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I:

THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS OF 1973 AND CONFLICT TERMINATION

On January 27, 1973, American Secretary of State William P. Rogers and North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh signed the Agreement for Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam.¹ The conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in that year would herald the end of American involvement in the quagmire of Vietnam. For the first time since 1956, American advisors would not be in the field with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Yet, in no sense, had the United States "abandoned" South Vietnam. Instead, the Nixon Administration had successfully disengaged the United States from the conflict, but just as importantly, had allowed the Republic of Vietnam to remain in a relatively advantageous military position against the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). President Richard Nixon had kept his promise to the American people, made in 1969, to achieve an "honourable peace."

When Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994) took the oath of office as the thirty-seventh President of the United States on January 20, 1969, his new administration faced a foreign

¹ Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978), p.1476.

policy disaster in Vietnam. The complexity of the foreign policy debacle inherited by the Nixon Administration was as serious as any problem encountered by any administration in this century. Prior to the end of World War Two, a clear tenet of American strategy had developed: avoid a war of attrition on the Asian mainland. This strategic point of view was most strongly expounded by General of the Army George C. Marshall, as Chief of Staff of the United States Army in World War Two, and as Secretary of State from 1947 to 1949.²

To General Marshall, American strategy in the Pacific, both during and after World War Two, had to be based on the concept of mobility, provided by overwhelming American air and naval strength.³ A strategy of encirclement would not only succeed in isolating strategic strong points, but would also provide the initiative to the United States, both tactically and strategically. By contrast, Marshall believed that a war on the Asian mainland could not possibly safeguard American interests. Instead, the United States would find itself waging a war of attrition with tenuous supply lines.

Marshall's assessment of American strategic requirements in the Pacific\Asia would profoundly influence the post-1945 administrations of Harry S. Truman (1945-1953) and Dwight D.

² Clay Blair, The Korean War: America's Forgotten War, (New York: Anchor Press, 1984), p.78.

³ Ibid.

Eisenhower (1953-1961). Perhaps Marshall's role in shaping American strategy reached its climax in 1948, when he served as Secretary of State. In the autumn of 1948, the Truman Administration was being vehemently berated for not intervening in the Chinese civil war on behalf of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. If Truman had been seen to "be soft on Communism," his political career would have certainly ended.

Such influential Republican Senators as Robert Taft were openly calling for American military intervention in China, a theme also adopted by such popular periodicals as Time.⁴ Truman could only ignore this pressure at his political peril. Yet, George C. Marshall would counter the interventionist diatribes of Senator Taft with a cold analysis of strategic reality. Unless the United States was willing to countenance the use of nuclear weapons, the Communist victory could not be averted. Marshall would declare: "We must not get sucked in!"⁵ President Truman would wisely follow this advice, which had the support of Secretary of Defence James V. Forrestal and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Marshall's strategic doctrine would influence American policy-makers long after he left public office. The decisions to limit the war in Korea (1950-1953) and to refuse to intervene at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 were a legacy of the policy

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, (New York: Random House, 1972), p.141.

of this sagacious man. Every American President from Franklin Roosevelt to Dwight Eisenhower was aware of the futility of a war on the Asian mainland and these men did everything in their power to avoid such a war. In fact, one can argue that the avoidance of a land war in Asia had become a central tenet of American strategic policy by 1961.

Nonetheless, when Richard Nixon entered office in 1969, the United States was engaged in a full-scale Asian land war! The warnings from Secretary of State Marshall and retired army officers, such as General of the Army Omar N. Bradley and General Matthew B. Ridgway had been essentially ignored by the Democratic Administrations of John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) and Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969). For President Johnson, and to a lesser extent President Kennedy, concern over "another Korea" was tempered by an erroneous perception of a communist monolith, directed from Beijing, that threatened Western interests in East Asia, in general, and South-East Asia in particular. To President Johnson and his senior civilian advisors, Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, South Vietnam became a test of American resolve to resist "Communist aggression." The erroneous appraisal of the international situation that was held by the Johnson Administration was best expounded by the President himself: "If we don't stop the Reds in South Vietnam, tomorrow they will be in Hawaii, and next they will

be in San Francisco."⁶

Therefore, in retrospect, the Johnson Administration's fallacious analysis of the international situation would lead to the worst foreign policy debacle for the United States this century. Yet, Richard Nixon must have appeared to be the wrong man in the White House in 1969 to end the war in Vietnam. During the 1950s, Nixon, then Vice-President, had been one of the most ardent of the Cold War warriors. In the 1952 Presidential campaign, for example, Nixon referred to the State Department as the Dean Acheson College for the Cowardly Containment of Communism.⁷ Nixon would perhaps best demonstrate his hawkish views in 1960 when he stressed the strategic importance of defending the Nationalist off-shore islands of Matsu and Quemoy against the People's Republic of China (PRC).⁸

Yet, these same qualities would actually help Richard Nixon in his efforts to conclude the Paris Peace Talks. Nixon was above all a consummate politician. He recognized that it was the Vietnam War that had destroyed the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson, elected in 1964 with a historic 61 percent of the popular vote. Nixon, who had endured many travails in his political career, was determined not to repeat the tragedy of

⁶ John T. Rourke, International Politics on the World Stage, (Guildford, Connecticut: Lushkin Publishing, 1993), p.25.

⁷ Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, p.95.

⁸ Ibid.

Lyndon Johnson. The United States had to negotiate a "peace with honour" to the war in Vietnam.

In addition, despite all his other weaknesses, Nixon had a realistic appraisal of the international situation. Unlike his immediate predecessors, he recognized that there was no Communist monolith directed from Moscow or Beijing. Instead, the Socialist bloc was seriously divided. If there ever had been a "Moscow-Beijing Axis," it had certainly been shattered by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Nikita Khrushchev, with the decision to recall Soviet economic advisors and to refuse to share nuclear technology with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1960.⁹ During the 1960s, the schism between Moscow and Beijing would worsen, due to differences in ideology and national interests, to the point of corps-sized clashes between the PLA and the Red Army along the Ussuri and Amur Rivers. Nixon recognized that dissension in the Socialist bloc could help facilitate a settlement to the war in Vietnam.

Thus, Richard Nixon, along with his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, would successfully conclude the Paris Peace Talks by using a combination of military pressure and the "China Card." In January of 1973, the American Secretary of State signed an agreement that allowed the United States to extricate itself from a war that did not serve its

⁹ Harrison E. Salisbury, The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng, (New York: Avon, 1992), p.209.

national interests. However, the Paris Peace Accords also provided a chance for an independent South Vietnam, despite the fact that the regime in Saigon was not at all pleased with the settlement. The problem was that American attention, and thus military power, was diverted from South-East Asia by the devastating impact of Watergate. As noted by both Nixon and Kissinger in various works, the Paris Peace Accords were far from perfect, but American military might would act as the lynchpin that would safeguard the peace.

The successful conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973 represented a partial victory for Hanoi as well. Since 1946, the Vietnamese Communists had been constantly at war to achieve their ultimate goal: the reunification of an independent Vietnam. This noble goal had apparently been achieved when the French Army suffered a disastrous rout at Dien Bien Phu in May of 1954. Yet, Vietnam would not be reunited by the Geneva Accords of 1954. Ho Chi Minh found himself under great pressure from Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to make huge concessions. The most important of these was the division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel with national elections to be held in 1956. These nation-wide elections would never be held because of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem's refusal to participate, a position backed by the Eisenhower Administration.

By January of 1959, the Central Committee of the Lao

Dong Party called for armed insurrection in the South. This decision resulted in the Kennedy Administration's commitment of almost 16,000 advisors by November of 1963. By the summer of 1965, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam(DRV) was in effect at war not only with the Republic of Vietnam, but also the United States. As long as the American people were willing to support a major war effort in South-East Asia, it was unlikely that Vietnam would be reunified.

Thus, it was in this context that the Paris Peace Accords represented a victory for Hanoi. One of the central purposes of the Paris Peace Accords, as noted by both Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, was to allow the United States to disengage itself from direct combat in Vietnam. For Hanoi, the Accords represented a drastic American retrenchment in South-East Asia. American ground troops were finally withdrawn and, perhaps most importantly, the punishing airstrikes against North Vietnam were finally brought to a halt. Hanoi now had good reason to doubt that American airpower would ever be decisive in the future conflict because of war-weariness in the United States and the actions being taken by the Congress to limit the President's scope of action in the use of military force, best exemplified by the War Powers Act of 1973.

The purpose of this introductory discussion has been to outline the complexity of the situation facing Nixon in Vietnam upon his inauguration. If the Vietnam War was a

quagmire for the United States, then the Paris Peace Accords must be considered one of the great American diplomatic triumphs since the Korean War. As noted by Henry Kissinger, the successful conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks demonstrated that the United States was still capable of decisive action on the world stage.¹⁰ No less critical, the United States was now free to exert its influence in areas of real strategic importance, such as the Middle East.

For the reasons outlined in the above discussion, the Paris Peace Accords must be considered one of the great achievements of American foreign policy. The purpose of this thesis will be to determine and analyze the major factors that led to a successful resolution of the Paris Peace Talks. That outcome will be studied by addressing four questions that are very much inter-related: What were the factors that led the respective parties to enter into the Paris Peace Talks in November of 1968, and eventually, to conclude the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973?; Why did the Paris Peace Talks drag on for so long?; Why did the United States accept a peace settlement that, from the perspective of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu(1967-1975), was not in Saigon's interests?, and finally, Why did Hanoi accept a peace settlement that apparently did not promote its two ultimate objectives: the reunification of Vietnam and the establishment of Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina?

¹⁰ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1436.

In the course of addressing these four questions, two central hypotheses will also be tested. The first will be that a settlement of the Paris Peace Talks was only possible after a fundamental shift had taken place in the negotiating strategy of the North Vietnamese Politburo by October of 1972. Only in the wake of the serious failure of the 1972 Nguyen Hue Offensive did North Vietnam accept peace terms in 1973 that had been essentially available in 1970. The second key hypothesis to be tested will be that the Nixon Administration was likewise under pressure to conclude the Paris Peace Talks because of the continued anti-war sentiment in the country, especially in the Congress and the business community. A review of the relevant theoretical and substantive literature reveals three dominant themes, each of which individually helps to explain why the two principal parties were finally able to reach a settlement in January of 1973. However, nowhere were these themes, to be called "catalysts" in this study, developed within a comprehensive framework. The specific contribution of this thesis to the literature on the Second Vietnam War will be to provide a comprehensive systematic framework within which to analyze the process and factors that led to a settlement of the conflict.

The first catalyst or theme to be analyzed will be military defeat\military stalemate. This catalyst is introduced in Getting to the Table by Janice Gross Stein,

although she uses the term "trigger."¹¹ Despite the fact that Stein's book deals with the process of prenegotiation, the concept is nonetheless relevant to the present study for two reasons. First, the thesis will explore the factors that motivated Lyndon Johnson to announce that he would not run for a second term, to declare a bombing halt above the 20th parallel in the DRV, and to announce that the United States was prepared to enter in peace talks with Hanoi, all of which were announced by Mr. Johnson in a national television address on March 31, 1968. Second, the thesis will argue that if reverses on the battlefield can lead to prenegotiations, then a major battlefield reversal may lead to an actual settlement.

In Getting to the Table, Stein recognizes the importance of military stalemate\military reversal leading to prenegotiations. She notes: "Most directly, as Zartman argues, mutual perception of a hurting stalemate informed by a recent or impending crisis leads policy-makers to consider actively the option of negotiation."¹² Clearly, Lyndon Johnson had been left devastated by the enemy's Tet Offensive of 1968. To the American public, the war appeared to be a hopeless stalemate. Johnson believed that negotiations were the only option because of the PAVN and Viet Cong(VC) "victory" at Tet. In other words, American public opinion was

¹¹ Janice Gross Stein, Getting to the Table, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p.242.

¹² Ibid, p.245.

obviously important.

Military reversal would act as a powerful catalyst in influencing the dramatic policy shift of the North Vietnamese Politburo in October of 1972 as well. C.R. Mitchell, in The Structure of Conflict, has argued that the likelihood of military defeat can lead to a peace settlement. As noted by Mitchell:

Rather than continue costly, and possibly ineffective, military operations either because a perceived stalemate exists or because defeat seems more likely than victory, a national government may take the difficult decision to send out peace feelers to the adversary through a neutral government, or prepare to make a direct compromise offer to the opposing party.¹³

This study will contend that Mitchell's analysis is not only applicable to the dramatic policy shift of the North Vietnamese Politburo in October of 1972, but also to the Johnson Administration's decision to enter into the Paris Peace Talks in March of 1968.

Another concept that is closely related to military stalemate\military reversal is tolerance of costs. In The Logic of International Relations, Walter Jones argues: "A party inferior in strength and yet superior in cost tolerance may be more powerful than a strong opponent less willing to suffer."¹⁴ This theory is very applicable to the Vietnam

¹³ C.R. Mitchell, The Structure of International Conflict, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p.165.

¹⁴ Walter S. Jones, The Logic of International Relations, (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1991), p.252.

War. Because the United States was unwilling to accept heavy casualties, as clearly demonstrated in the collapse of popular support for the war after the Tet Offensive, Washington found itself compelled to enter into the Paris Peace Talks. Thus, Ho Chi Minh's warning to the United States in 1965 was proven correct: "In the end the Americans will kill ten patriots for every American who dies, but it is they who will tire first."¹⁵ The United States by 1973 was unwilling to endure further costs.

Clearly, the high morale and discipline of the North Vietnamese people were great assets. However, the relative importance of cost tolerance cannot be overestimated. Despite the obvious fact that by 1973 the Nixon Administration had lost all popular support for a continuation of the war, the Politburo accepted a peace settlement in January of 1973 that had been categorically rejected in May of 1972. This thesis will argue that Hanoi's crucial "volte face" in October, 1972, was precipitated by its own cost tolerance having been reached in the form of military reversal.

Cost tolerance is closely related to the second "trigger" identified by Stein: domestic instability. Stein writes: "[P]renegotiation is triggered by an attempt to prevent a crisis or to manage a relationship in the wake of a recent crisis."¹⁶ This catalyst is especially pertinent to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Stein, Getting to the Table, p.240.

the Paris Peace Talks of 1968-1973. Domestic pressures were clearly very important in the decision of both parties to enter into the negotiation phase and the eventual decision to conclude a peace agreement.

Stein limits domestic instability as a "trigger" only to the prenegotiation stage. Yet, domestic instability, if greatly exacerbated, perhaps by military defeat, can also lead to a settlement. This factor can take many forms. Such manifestations of domestic unrest as food riots, student strikes, and growing political opposition can all threaten the survival of the regime. This thesis will also consider divisions within a country's leadership as a manifestation of domestic unrest. If a belligerent is suffering critical reverses on the battlefield and there are signs of domestic unrest, usually a "dovish" faction will emerge, calling for an end to hostilities.

Yet, at the same time that one faction may be calling for an end to hostilities, another faction may be tempted to fight on if military reverse is not clear. Mitchell has noted that: "[F]actions within each party arguing for a continuation of the coercive strategies, for 'more of the same,' for a little greater effort to bring final success will be stronger and more persuasive."¹⁷ Thus, only with clear military reversal, which had occurred for Hanoi by September of 1972, would the views of the "dovish" faction dominate.

¹⁷ Mitchell, The Structure of International Conflict, p.179.

Clearly, military stalemate\military reversal and domestic instability are two catalysts that are inextricably linked. Obviously from the theoretical literature on conflict resolution and the various case studies presented, it is futile to consider one catalyst in isolation from the other. Stein has written that the fear of a domestic crisis resulting from military stalemate will often lead a belligerent to prenegotiation.¹⁸ This study will extend Stein's argument beyond the prenegotiations stage to the actual peace settlement.

Therefore, a strong argument can be made that the combination of disastrous military reversal and domestic problems was the determining factor in Hanoi's decision to conclude the Paris Peace Talks, as clearly expounded by the "Nine Points" put forward by North Vietnamese Special Advisor Le Duc Tho to Henry Kissinger in Paris on October 8, 1972. The North Vietnamese decision to offer a new negotiating position in the autumn of 1972 that, with some modifications, was essentially the one put forward by the Nixon Administration in 1969, can again be explained by reference to the two catalysts. Mitchell has observed:

Those wishing to terminate the conflict will argue that the costs and risks of prolonging the conflict far outweigh those of compromising now, and that the, admittedly uncertain benefits of a settlement soon also outweigh more uncertain benefits to be obtained at some unspecified future time, when an even greater position of dominance may have been

¹⁸ Stein, Getting to the Table, p.240.

gained over the opposing party.¹⁹

Surely, similar arguments were made in the Politburo of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by such "moderates" as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Pham Van Dong, and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, in the autumn of 1972. Yet, the same arguments held true for Washington, as well. The theoretical works that were surveyed were generally found to define possible manifestations of domestic unrest in a very narrow manner. Only one work, C.R. Mitchell's The Structure of International Conflict, was found to consider intra-party factionalism a legitimate obstacle in any negotiations. All too often in the literature on the Second Vietnam War, the respective parties, especially the North Vietnamese Politburo, are treated as monolithic entities. As this thesis will demonstrate, a leading factor that led to the Paris Peace Talks being so dragged out were serious divisions within the Politburo in Hanoi. After the death of the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, on September 3, 1969, at least three factions emerged within the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party.

The recognition of intra-party factionalism is vital to understanding the dynamic of negotiations. Mitchell has again presciently noted that:

A more realistic approach is one which acknowledges that many parties in conflict have a more complex

¹⁹ Mitchell, The Structure of International Conflict, p.167.

structure than that of a single individual, and takes into account such factors as intra-party conflicts and rivalries, the distribution of factional influence, bureaucratic factors making for slow decision-making and differing perceptions of the adversary held by intra-party factions.²⁰

Thus, Hanoi could not move towards a conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks until a consensus had been reached in the Politburo to do so.

So far, the theoretical literature clearly indicates that two catalysts are often decisive in leading to conflict termination. This thesis will present the argument that it was primarily military reversal\military stalemate, along with domestic concerns, that led to the acceptance of the Paris Peace Accords for both belligerents. In addition, this thesis will further contend that a third catalyst enhanced the effect of the above two catalysts.

This third catalyst, the role of the international balance of power, would prove crucial to the eventual conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks. Yet, strangely, there is virtually nothing in the theoretical literature that would anticipate the unique roles of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The literature on conflict resolution considers the role of third players in two broad ways: as mediators and as direct participants in hostilities. Clearly, neither the USSR nor PRC acted as third players in these forms. Yet, the role of

²⁰ Ibid, p.185.

the two Communist giants would be paramount in the successful conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973. Indeed, no less an eminent person than Richard Nixon himself considered the "triangular diplomacy" with the USSR and PRC as the key to the successful conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks.²¹

The theoretical work on the role of third players as mediators in conflict resolution is extensive. One leading exponent is Dean G. Pruitt who has argued that third players can often influence stalemated negotiations through mediation:

Third parties frequently become involved in negotiation...They may also intrude themselves, as when a powerful state intervenes in a controversy between two client states that threatens the broader aims of the alliance. Third party intervention ordinarily has the function of resolving a difficult conflict that is dangerous to continue.²²

Likewise, Janice Gross Stein, in her case studies in Getting to the Table, recognized the importance of the roles of third actors as mediators. Yet, the mediatory role of third players, as described by Pruitt and Stein, is clearly not applicable to the Paris Peace Talks of 1968-1973.

Fred Iklé's Every War Must End also fails to provide any useful theoretical background, as he only considered third players in the most classical role: direct military

²¹ Richard M. Nixon, No More Vietnams, (New York: Avon, 1984), p.147.

²² Dean G. Pruitt, Negotiation Behaviour, (New York: Academic Press, 1981), p.201.

intervention. In establishing strategy and war aims, Ikle notes that a belligerent must consider third parties:

One's own mobilization potential and that of the enemy are not isolated from the rest of the world. On the one hand, they may be augmented by friendly powers and future allies; on the other hand, some military forces may have to be reserved for further contingencies. External aid might enlarge the resources available for the war effort, real or imagined threats from other powers might draw forces to another front, and new conflicts between third parties in other theaters might radically alter the ambitions and restraints of the original belligerents.²³

Iklé's analysis is not without merit. This argument provides useful background to President Johnson's dramatic speech of March 31, 1968. Johnson believed that the war could not be won. If the United States attempted to escalate the war, as called for by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Commander-in-Chief, General William C. Westmoreland, (USA), the President was convinced that Soviet and/or Chinese intervention would ensue.

Yet, Iklé's work Every War Must End predated the successful conclusion of Nixon's "triangular diplomacy." Thus, it can not specifically provide any in depth analysis of the "strategic triangle." In retrospect, the "triangular diplomacy" of Richard Nixon was perhaps unique in the history of international relations. Super Power détente and Sino-American rapprochement in the early 1970s were both diplomatic

²³ Fred C. Iklé, Every War Must End, (New York: Columbia University, 1971), p.23.

milestones of the post-Korean War world. Thus, there is no true historical parallel for comparison purposes, so the reader can gain a greater understanding of the importance of this third catalyst.

Nixon's successful "triangular diplomacy" was, in many respects, a crucial factor or catalyst in the Paris Peace Talks. Even Gareth Porter, a staunch critic of Nixon's Vietnam policy, has noted:

The DRV had not reckoned, however, with Nixon's ability to manipulate detente with the Soviet Union and China for his own internal political benefit, thus nullifying, in effect, the damaging political impact of the offensive and the re-escalation of American military involvement in South Vietnam. By showing that he could take unprecedented military measures against North Vietnam without jeopardizing detente, Nixon was able to regain public confidence at home in his ability to end the war, and to resist the DRV demand for a transitional coalition, which would have signified a clear-cut defeat for the American effort.²⁴

Thus, there is a clear consensus in the literature, from right-wing writers such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, as well as left-of-centre writers, such as Gareth Porter, that the "triangular diplomacy" of the Nixon Administration was indeed a catalyst that was very crucial to the eventual conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973.

This introductory chapter has had two broad goals. First, it has attempted to justify the importance of the Paris Peace Accords. Second, it has explained the analytical

²⁴ Gareth Porter, A Peace Denied, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975), p.102.

framework to be used to argue the two central hypotheses: the Paris Peace Accords resulted from a fundamental shift in the negotiating position of Hanoi in October of 1972 and the Nixon Administration was under great domestic pressure to end American involvement in Vietnam. These hypotheses were formed in relation to four central questions: What were the factors that led the two respective parties to enter into the Paris Peace Talks in 1968, and subsequently, to conclude the Paris Peace Accords in 1973? Why did the Paris Peace Talks last for almost fifty-one months? Why did the United States accept a peace settlement, which from the point of view of South Vietnamese President Thieu, was not in Saigon's interests? and finally, Why did Hanoi accept a peace settlement that apparently failed to achieve its paramount objective, reunification of Vietnam?

With a basic theoretical framework in place, the thesis will now proceed to analyze specific "historical snapshots." In developing these "snapshots," the three catalysts will be used to justify the two hypotheses presented.

For the purposes of this thesis, four "historical snapshots" have been chosen. The first two and the last one, the Tet Offensive, President Johnson's decision to enter into the Paris Peace Talks, and the Nguyen Hue Offensive (1972) have already been briefly mentioned. The third "historical snapshot" relates to the South Vietnamese-American incursions into Cambodia and Laos in April of 1970 and February of 1971,

respectively. The two separate campaigns are being studied together because they resulted from the same strategy: disrupt the supply lines of the PAVN to buy time for American troop withdrawals and the process of Vietnamization.

The following sections and chapters of the thesis will make use of a wide variety of sources. Sources will include right-of-centre sources, such as the memoirs of President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, as well as books by senior American military men, such as General Bruce R. Palmer, Jr., (USA). To provide a more balanced perspective, left-of-centre sources will also be utilized, including Gabriel Kolko's Anatomy of a War and Gareth Porter's A Peace Denied. Such a rich and diverse range of substantive literature will provide the basic answers to the four questions raised in this introduction.

PART II: THE ROAD TO THE PARIS PEACE TALKS

CHAPTER II: THE TET OFFENSIVE OF 1968

As General William C. Westmoreland, Commander-in-Chief, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), prepared to retire in the late evening of January 30, 1968, his mind was troubled.²⁵ He remained fixated on the threat posed by the People's Army of Vietnam's (PAVN) build-up in the two northern-most provinces of South Vietnam, Quang Tri and Thua Thien. Above all, Westmoreland was deeply concerned about the beleaguered Marine garrison under siege at the isolated outpost of Khe Sanh. General Westmoreland's chief of military intelligence, Brigadier-General Phillip B. Davidson, Jr., (USA), had become convinced that the decisive North Vietnamese effort would come during or after Tet.²⁶

For almost two months, General Westmoreland had been preparing for this "decisive battle" in the two northern-most provinces of South Vietnam. The PAVN threat to the densely populated coastal lowlands of Quang Tri and Thua Thien became most obvious on December 20. On this date, the commanding officer of the 3rd Marine Division, Major-General Rathvon McC.

²⁵ General William C. Westmoreland, (USA-Retired), "Perspectives," Vietnam, edited by Colonel H.G. Summers, (USA-Retired), January, 1993, p.62.

²⁶ Brigadier-General Edwin H. Simmons, (USMC-Retired), Marines, (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p.74.

Tompkins, (USMC), alerted the commander of the III Marine Amphibious Force, Lieutenant-General Robert E. Cushman, (USMC), that the 308 and 325C PAVN divisions were digging in around Khe Sanh. If the Marine outpost at Khe Sanh, garrisoned in mid-December by only the 3rd battalion, 26th Marines, was allowed to fall, then the entire Marine line along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) could be outflanked, leaving the cities of Dong Ha, Quang Tri, and Hue extremely vulnerable. Yet, if Khe Sanh was to be held, it would have to be reinforced and reserves would have to be committed for the eventual lifting of the siege. General Westmoreland decided that Khe Sanh would be held, a decision supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in far-off Washington, D.C.²⁷

By January 30, 1968, all of the forces committed by Westmoreland to hold and then to relieve Khe Sanh were in place. The alacrity of the American response to the threat to Khe Sanh was due to the fact, as argued by Robert Pisor in End of the Line, that Westmoreland had begun a military build-up in Quang Tri and Thua Thien as early as November of 1967.²⁸ Westmoreland was preparing the stage for the move that he believed would end the war: interdiction of the Laotian panhandle by American ground forces. At the New Year, the XXIVth Provisional Corps, under the command of Lieutenant-

²⁷ Westmoreland, "Perspectives," p.63.

²⁸ Robert L. Pisor, End of the line, (New York: Viking Press, 1981), p.34.

General William B. Rosson, (USA), was combat-ready with two of its three divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and the 3rd Marine Division, deployed in Quang Tri. Westmoreland was convinced that 1968 would be the decisive "turning point" in the war.²⁹ Little did he know that his judgement would be proven valid for the wrong reasons.

At the same time that General Westmoreland was preparing to retire for the evening, another senior American military man, Lieutenant-General Frederick C. Weyand, (USA), commanding officer of II Field Force Vietnam (II FFV), was also deeply disturbed by recent trends in his command.³⁰ During September and early October of 1967, the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions had engaged in bloody firefights with the 9th Viet Cong(VC) Division at Tay Ninh, Loc Ninh, and Song Be.³¹ However, by mid-October, the VC regiments had withdrawn to their sanctuaries in eastern Cambodia to rest and refit. This occurrence was hardly unusual: it was the general tactic of the enemy. Lieutenant-General Weyand became deeply concerned about events that followed, however.

For the next three and a half months, there would be virtually no enemy activity in the II FFV area. There were very few skirmishes between the VC and American or South

²⁹ General William C. Westmoreland, (USA-Retired), A Soldier Reports, (New York: Random House, 1976), p.341.

³⁰ Jack Shulimson, Tet-1968, (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p.14.

³¹ Pisor, End of the Line, p.41.

Vietnamese troops. In addition, the enemy had stopped regular patrols. Perhaps most strangely, there was a heavy influx of refugees coming from the western provinces of South Vietnam to Saigon. To Lieutenant-General Weyand it must have seemed like déjà vu: as a young officer in France in 1944, he had witnessed similar conditions prior to the Battle of the Bulge!

Weyand's fears were exacerbated by American military intelligence. Intelligence estimates for 1967 placed total North Vietnamese infiltration at 200,000.³² Yet, in the first month of 1968, the rate of enemy infiltration actually increased.³³ Aerial reconnaissance also indicated a major increase in enemy activity in the Cambodian sanctuaries. Weyand came to the conclusion that the enemy was preparing for a major offensive against Saigon itself.³⁴

At a meeting of senior American military men in Saigon on January 10, 1968, Lieutenant-General Weyand presented his views. In attendance at this conference were General Westmoreland, Brigadier-General Davidson, Brigadier-General John M. Chaisson, (USMC), Westmoreland's director of operations, and Lieutenant-General Bruce R. Palmer, Jr., commanding general, United States Army Vietnam.³⁵ Although Weyand's colleagues were somewhat sceptical of the possibility

³² Lanning and Cragg, Inside the VC and the NVA, p.58.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Shulimson, Tet, p.23.

³⁵ Ibid.

of a full-scale enemy attack against Saigon, they recognized that Saigon was very vulnerable. General Westmoreland supported Weyand's request to withdraw the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions from the Cambodian border and to relocate them near Saigon.³⁶ In retrospect, this decision was one of the most important taken by the American military in 1968. If the Viet Cong 5th and 9th Divisions had not encountered strong American forces guarding the strategic western approaches to Saigon, then surely Lieutenant-General Tran Van Tra, the senior military officer of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), would have infiltrated at least one of his divisions into Saigon to support the local force VC units. As it was, the only sustained heavy fighting in Saigon was largely localized, in Cholon.

Although senior American military men had some serious concerns, they had no doubt that the war could be won. The same cannot be said of their Commander-in-Chief, however. By the fall of 1967, Lyndon Johnson had become utterly disenchanted with the war in Vietnam. Johnson saw no way to end the war without risking Chinese intervention. In April of 1967, General Westmoreland declared in a private session with the President that "the war could go on indefinitely" unless he was allowed to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail with ground

³⁶ Ibid.

forces.³⁷ Johnson's rationale for refusing this logical request was evinced in a comment made to an aide: "I am not going to spit in China's face."³⁸

The attitude of the Administration, in general, and the President, in particular, is perhaps best symbolized by the fate of Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara (1961-1968). McNamara, more than any other senior official in the Johnson Administration, was the driving force behind the American military commitment and then build-up in Vietnam. By January of 1965, the reports coming from the American Ambassador in Saigon, General Maxwell D. Taylor (USA-Ret) and the MACV Commander-in-Chief, General Westmoreland, were painfully clear: unless American combat troops were introduced into South Vietnam immediately, the country would fall to the Communists. McNamara, along with National Security Advisor MacGeorge Bundy, formulated the American response which would lead the United States into its worst foreign policy debacle of this century.

The Secretary of Defence believed that the key to ending the conflict in South Vietnam was forcing Hanoi to accept a settlement. The Pentagon was convinced that a gradually escalating strategic air campaign against North Vietnam would

³⁷ Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History, (New York: Penguin, 1985), p.543.

³⁸ Ibid.

lead the Politburo in Hanoi to capitulate to American demands.³⁹ Thus, in February of 1965, President Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder. At the same time, the situation on the ground in South Vietnam had to be stabilized. To achieve this objective, McNamara endorsed General Westmoreland's dramatic request for forty-four battalions (34 from the United States, 9 from the Republic of Korea, and one from Australia) to be committed to the conflict.⁴⁰ On June 28, 1965, President Johnson announced on national television that he had accepted Westmoreland's proposal and that the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was to be deployed immediately.

By November and December of 1965, as noted by David Halberstam in The Best and the Brightest, Mr. McNamara had become deeply alarmed about the conduct of the war.⁴¹ Operation Rolling Thunder, according to intelligence reports, was not restricting infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Most ominously, the Politburo in Hanoi showed no evidence that it was prepared to accept American demands for a negotiated settlement to the war in South Vietnam. Indeed, the strategic bombing campaign against North Vietnam actually strengthened the resolve of the North Vietnamese people to resist American "imperialism."

Therefore, Mr. McNamara now found himself in a

³⁹ Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, p.349.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

complicated dilemma. The underlying premise of the American military build-up, that a strategic air campaign would quickly lead to a negotiated peace settlement, was proven invalid by December of 1965. McNamara could either advise his President to gradually withdraw from Vietnam, a decision that would have been political suicide for Lyndon Johnson in 1965-1966, or to gradually escalate American troop strength in South-East Asia (a rapid military build-up, which would have necessitated the activation of the reserves was considered to be politically risky), without any clear strategic objective in sight. McNamara, because of his misguided faith in statistics and behavioural procedures, had unwittingly led the Administration into a land war in Asia. Up to his last days in the Pentagon, Mr. McNamara would never fully understand why Operation Rolling Thunder had failed to lead Hanoi to accept a negotiated settlement. To the former President of the Ford Motor Company, Hanoi's intransigent position must have seemed utterly illogical. McNamara's confusion about the state of the war, according to many of his senior aides, reached its zenith in June of 1966, when President Johnson ordered a temporary bombing halt. The Johnson Administration informed Hanoi, through the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, that the United States was prepared to extend the bombing halt and to implement a \$1 billion development project for the Mekong Delta, in return for a North Vietnamese

commitment to end its support for the war in the South.⁴² The Politburo in Hanoi categorically rejected the offer.

President Johnson, Secretary of Defence McNamara, and National Security Advisor MacGeorge Bundy were utterly perplexed. According to The Pentagon Papers, it was at this time that serious divisions emerged within the Johnson Administration.⁴³ The split within the Administration was perhaps best symbolized by MacGeorge Bundy's resignation in November of 1966. Bundy had been one of the staunchest advocates of an American military build-up in the debates of the winter of 1964-1965. By the autumn of 1966, Bundy was convinced that the war was hopeless.⁴⁴ Upon his resignation, President Johnson replaced him with a "hawk," Walt W. Rostow.

Robert McNamara was no longer an effective war manager for President Johnson. The Secretary of Defence realized that the gigantic American military build-up in South Vietnam was only reinforcing Hanoi's determination to continue the conflict. Nevertheless, McNamara could not envision any way that Washington might extricate itself from the quagmire in Vietnam. By 1966, the American war effort in Vietnam no longer had a sound strategic direction.

⁴² George Esper, The Associated Press Eye-Witness History of the Vietnam War, (New York: Associated Press, 1985), P.106.

⁴³ James W. Gibson, The Perfect War, (Boston: Atlantic Press, 1990), p.398.

⁴⁴ Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, p.498.

The Secretary of Defence was a broken man. He had advised his President to commit his country to a land war in Asia, in which, if Operation Rolling Thunder failed to force Hanoi to accept a negotiated settlement, there was no alternative strategy to end the conflict. By December of 1965, McNamara realized that Operation Rolling Thunder had failed in its central objective. American troop strength in South Vietnam would gradually increase, to a peak of 582,000 personnel in March of 1968, but there was no ultimate strategic objective that the build-up was meant to achieve.

In the autumn of 1967, McNamara submitted his resignation to the President. Johnson deferred his acceptance of the resignation until March of 1968, for two reasons. First of all, the President had to find a suitable successor. Second, President Johnson was concerned about the negative impact that such a high-level resignation might have in the media and in the Congress. Finally, on March 1, 1968, a prominent Washington lawyer, Clark W. Clifford, succeeded Mr. McNamara at the Pentagon.⁴⁵

Perhaps what was most relevant in relation to the decision-making process in the Johnson Administration and perhaps even symbolic about Mr. McNamara's resignation as Secretary of Defence regarded his health. In all of the literature on the Vietnam War, there is an implicit consensus over the McNamara resignation: it was prompted by emotional

⁴⁵ Karnow, Vietnam, p.532.

instability. Indeed, Lyndon Johnson himself stated that one of the reasons he accepted his Secretary of Defence's resignation was a fear that the pressures of the job would lead to a suicide attempt on Mr. McNamara's part.⁴⁶ Thus, by the end of January, 1968, the war in South Vietnam had claimed another victim.

Clearly, senior officials in both the Administration and the military believed that 1968 would be a decisive year in the war. Yet, what is most remarkable about the American leadership was the deep foreboding of the Commander-in-Chief. Lyndon Johnson, just like Richard Nixon, was a political animal: he recognized that the war was eroding his Presidency. On the eve of the Tet Offensive, Johnson's popular approval stood at 48 percent of the electorate, his lowest standing since taking office.⁴⁷ The President recognized that the situation was only going to worsen. In December of 1967, while addressing the Australian cabinet of Prime Minister John McEwen, Johnson declared that "dark days lie ahead in Vietnam."⁴⁸ The remark was truly prophetic.

At the same time that Administration officials and American military men were preparing for the decisive year of the war, their opposite numbers in Hanoi were now ready to execute perhaps the boldest strategy of the war--a

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Shulimson, Tet, p.61.

countrywide, general offensive. The Tet Offensive is generally associated with the Minister of Defence of the DRV, Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap. In fact, Giap was not the progenitor of the radical strategy. The Tet Offensive was the "brainchild" of Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh, Chairman of COSVN from its establishment in June of 1964, until his death in July of 1967. By the spring of 1967, Thanh believed that the American war effort was in serious trouble. American combat units were operating in areas, particularly along the Demilitarized Zone(DMZ) and the Cambodian border, where North Vietnamese forces enjoyed short lines of communication which left the tactical initiative to the North Vietnamese commanders. Thanh argued to his colleagues in the Politburo that a series of coordinated, countrywide offensives could lead to a military disaster for the United States.⁴⁹ However, before Senior General Thanh could forge the needed consensus within the Politburo, he died of heart failure in Hanoi in July of 1967.⁵⁰

Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap now emerged at the forefront. Giap agreed that a large scale, countryside offensive could prove decisive to the North Vietnamese war effort. Yet, he fundamentally altered Senior General Thanh's concept in two crucial ways. Apparently, Thanh had envisioned

⁴⁹ Edward Doyle, Samuel Lipsman, and Terence Maitland, The North, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984), p.61.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

the Tet Offensive as a series of regimental-size attacks upon American ground forces near the DMZ and in the western Central Highlands. Senior General Giap changed the focus of the Tet Offensive from remote border areas to the most populous regions of South Vietnam, Saigon and the Mekong Delta.⁵¹ In addition, the Communist forces were to concentrate the bulk of their offensive against the ARVN, not American ground units.⁵² These changes were implemented by Senior General Giap to exacerbate the perceived political instability and military weakness of the Saigon regime.

Vo Nguyen Giap intended the Tet Offensive to have three stages. In the first stage, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces would engage American units and draw American strength away from the most heavily populated regions of the country.⁵³ Once this stage had been completed, by December of 1967, the offensive was to enter into its all important second stage. By launching a massive, countrywide offensive, the Communist political and military leadership hoped that a series of disastrous reverses would lead to the collapse of the ARVN and a "General Uprising" in South Vietnam against the Saigon regime.⁵⁴ With the legitimacy and authority of the

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Robert Pisor, "Faking MACV Out of Position," Vietnam, edited by Colonel H.G. Summers, (USA-Retired), January, 1993, p.40.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Saigon regime shattered, the Communist forces would launch a series of countrywide, coordinated attacks against American forces, beginning in May.⁵⁵ The collapse of the South Vietnamese government and army would force the American military leadership to withdraw American ground units to a series of enclaves along the coast. Giap expected that the final series of large scale attacks, against the American coastal enclaves, would force the United States out of the war. Sometime in the late summer of 1967, the North Vietnamese Politburo approved Senior General Giap's concept of the Tet Offensive.

The Tet Offensive was the boldest and most ambitious strategy ever conceived and executed by the senior leadership of the Lao Dong Party and the PAVN. Beginning on January 30 and 31, over 84,000 Communist troops, almost exclusively drawn from the ranks of the Viet Cong, struck military and civilian targets the length and breadth of South Vietnam. Thirty-six of the forty-four provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, sixty-four of the two hundred forty-two district capitals, and over 50 hamlets were struck by the Communists in at least battalion level size attacks.⁵⁶ With the exception of Saigon, the Viet Cong main force units avoided American units and concentrated the full thrust of their offensive against the ARVN. Almost without exception,

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.43.

⁵⁶ Shulimson, Tet, p.86.

ARVN units succeeded in weathering the initial onslaught from the Viet Cong, despite the facts that the attacking forces enjoyed the element of surprise and that most ARVN units were at barely fifty percent strength. The ability of the ARVN regular line units to withstand the initial assault from the Viet Cong would drastically affect the overall Communist strategy.

The Tet Offensive would be characterized by fundamental differences in its execution in the two northern corps and the two southern corps. In I Corps and the Central Highlands, the Communist forces, either by error or design, would begin their offensive almost twenty-four hours ahead of the Viet Cong units around Saigon and in the Mekong Delta.⁵⁷ In addition, in I and II Corps, the North Vietnamese high command committed a large number of PAVN regiments. By contrast, the Tet Offensive in the two southern corps only began on January 31 and did not involve PAVN regulars. The fighting in I and II Corps also involved a far larger American troop commitment than in the southern corps. Thus, it is not invalid to argue that the Tet Offensive was actually two separate offensives, from a tactical viewpoint.

In northern-most I Corps, the Tet Offensive began on January 30 with a heavy rocket and mortar barrage against the giant Marine air station at Da Nang. The artillery barrage was followed by a ground assault from the R-20 and V-25 Viet

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Cong battalions. In heavy fighting, the units of the 1st Marine Division stationed south-west of Da Nang decimated the Viet Cong battalions.⁵⁸ The next day, the enemy offensive spread. The US 7th Marine Regiment routed the 31st Viet Cong Regiment in the An Hoa region.⁵⁹ In the remainder of I Corps, large scale enemy attacks against Quang Tri, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Tam Ky were repulsed by the ARVN. Only in the city of Hue, which was seized by the 4th and 6th PAVN regiments on the morning of January 31, would heavy fighting last for more than forty-eight hours.

The fighting in II Corps would follow a similar pattern as in I Corps: a limited number of large scale attacks by PAVN regiments, beginning on January 30. By the early morning hours of January 31, the Communists launched attacks against seven of the twelve provincial capitals and over ten regimental size ground assaults.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the fighting in the Central Highlands was never as desperate as in Hue or Saigon. By February 1, the ARVN had weathered the initial onslaught and had moved to the counter-attack. Only in the city of Kontum, which was attacked on the morning of January 30 by a PAVN regiment and two Viet Cong battalions, did substantial American ground units have to be committed.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Simmons, Marines, p.97.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Shulimson, Tet, p.83.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.82.

By contrast, the Tet Offensive was far more widespread in the Mekong Delta, the ARVN IV Corps area. Regiment size attacks were launched against Ben Tre, Chau Doc, Cai Be, Cai Lay, Can Tho, My Tho, Soc Trang, Truc Giang, and Vinh Long.⁶² National Route 4, the major road in the Mekong Delta, was cut in sixty-two different places.⁶³ Nonetheless, despite the scale of the Viet Cong offensive and the fact that most South Vietnamese units were caught off-guard, the ARVN in IV Corps fought extremely well. The ability of the units of IV Corps to blunt the Viet Cong offensive and then to go over to counter-attack without reinforcements from the American II FFV or the South Vietnamese strategic reserve is clear evidence to support this argument.

However, the greatest effort was made by the Viet Cong in the attack upon Saigon. Clearly, the military commander of COSVN, Lieutenant-General Tran Van Tra, considered Saigon the key to the Tet Offensive. A total of thirty-five battalions, under the command of Lieutenant-General Tran Do, were committed to the assault on Saigon.⁶⁴ The capital of South Vietnam was held by the five battalions of the 5th ARVN Ranger Group and the 1st and 8th ARVN Airborne battalions. Only a single American unit, the 716th Military Police battalion, was in Saigon on January 31, although an additional twenty-three

⁶² Ibid, p.87.

⁶³ Ibid, p.85.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.82.

American battalions could reinforce the capital within a relatively short period of time.⁶⁵

The Viet Cong attack upon Saigon began at 2:45 AM on January 31 with a daring commando raid. A squad from the elite C-10 Sapper Battalion launched a bold attack on the bastion of American power in South Vietnam, the United States' embassy.⁶⁶ For six and a half hours, the Viet Cong waged a running battle with American and South Vietnamese forces. The fact that such a small force was tasked with such an important mission, without reinforcements, indicated that the Communists never actually planned to capture the embassy. Instead, the attack was designed to have a symbolic effect for the American people.

The truly substantive fighting in Saigon took place in the Chinese quarter of the city, Cholon, and at the large American bases at Long Binh, Bien Hoa, and Tan Son Nhut.⁶⁷ In Cholon, the equivalent of two Viet Cong regiments established themselves in strong defensive positions. After two weeks of extremely heavy fighting, South Vietnamese and American forces succeeded in clearing Cholon.⁶⁸ At the large

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.76.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ General Bruce R. Palmer, Jr., (USA-retired), The 25 Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam, (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), p.197.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

bases north of Saigon, the commitment of American reserves from II FFV routed regimental size Viet Cong attacks.

Thus, by February 26, the Tet Offensive had finally been defeated by South Vietnamese and American ground units. In the context of the analytical framework introduced in Chapter I, the Tet Offensive was to prove the determining factor in Washington's decision to initiate peace talks with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Hanoi's decision to enter into the talks. Washington was motivated by the perception of an impossible military stalemate, while Hanoi had to gain time to recover from the disastrous losses suffered in the Tet Offensive.

Clearly, the Tet Offensive was a serious failure for the PAVN and the Viet Cong, tactically. Total casualties suffered during the offensive, according to American estimates, were 40,000 personnel killed in action (KIA). Most of the KIAs were Viet Cong cadres, who could not be easily replaced. Therefore, the Viet Cong urban infrastructure was left devastated. For the remainder of the war, the bulk of the heavy fighting would be conducted by the PAVN, not the Viet Cong.

Yet, the Tet Offensive was not a clear cut success for the South Vietnamese and the Americans. Although the ARVN generally fought well, the heavy casualties suffered greatly reduced its combat effectiveness. The elite units which comprised the corps' reserves and the strategic reserve were

left decimated. The Ranger battalions were reduced to 40 percent strength, while four of the nine battalions of the Airborne Division were rated as "combat ineffective."⁶⁹ Perhaps more serious, the pacification programme of the Saigon government was in a shambles. Only the cities were firmly in government control.

The military weakness of the South Vietnamese government was complicated by incompetent leadership. During the Tet Offensive, South Vietnamese corps and division commanders had not performed their duties adequately. After the Tet Offensive, this fact was recognized by President Thieu when he relieved the commanders of II and IV Corps, Major-Generals Vinh Loc and Nguyen Van Manh, respectively.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, President Thieu's shake-up of the senior command of the ARVN failed to address one all important problem: Thieu's regime lacked stability.

Thus, the Tet Offensive clearly evinced the fundamental weakness of American strategy in Vietnam. As long as the Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and the supply lines in the Laotian panhandle were exempt from American ground attack, Communist forces enjoyed the initiative and even the cities of South Vietnam were not secure from attack. By the end of February, 1968, the White House recognized that a military

⁶⁹ Gabriel Kolko, Anatomy of a War, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p.310.

⁷⁰ Shulimson, Tet, p.144.

stalemate existed in South Vietnam. As long as American ground forces were prohibited from entering Laos and Cambodia, the conflict could not be brought to an end.

CHAPTER III: WASHINGTON BEGINS DEESCALATION

Tet of 1968 was the single most important event of the Second Vietnam War. The ability of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to launch a massive, countrywide offensive clearly demonstrated that the American strategy for conducting the war in Vietnam had failed. Therefore, the Johnson Administration had to deal with an extremely serious political and military crisis in which major economic, political and military constraints greatly limited the decision-making power of the Administration. In other words, the United States was involved in an Asian land war with no end in sight. The war also had other important consequences: serious social problems, an overextended and weak military that could not protect vital American interests, such as the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, and the worst financial crisis since October, 1929. Therefore, President Johnson concluded in late March of 1968 that the United States had to disengage itself from the conflict in South-East Asia.

To President Johnson and his new Secretary of Defence, Clark W. Clifford, the Vietnam War seemed to be hopelessly stalemated. The only way for the United States to "end" the war was by interdicting the North Vietnamese supply lines in the Laotian Panhandle and destroying the Communist base areas

in Cambodia with American ground troops. On paper at least, this approach was valid. The Viet Cong forces had been decimated by the Tet Offensive and in most regions of South Vietnam, Viet Cong military units would only play secondary, rather unimportant roles, essentially in the Mekong Delta. Thus, as noted by Philip Chinnery, Senior Lecturer at the United States Air Force Academy:

Now was the time to abolish the prohibited zones (for the air campaign) around Hanoi and Haiphong and along the border with China. The major ports and harbors could have been mined to cut off outside support to the North [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] and a major air campaign without restrictions could have destroyed the war-making capability of North Vietnam.⁷¹

Chinnery's analysis is not without merit. Clearly, the PAVN and especially the Viet Cong had suffered a devastating defeat, tactically. Even if the Communist casualties were inflated by American military intelligence, as argued by Gabriel Kolko,⁷² the main force units of the Viet Cong were left devastated, with a shattered urban infrastructure and, perhaps most seriously, a weakened rural infrastructure. The only effective Communist ground units left in South Vietnam were PAVN regiments. A full scale American offensive against the base areas in Cambodia and supply lines in the Laotian Panhandle could have been decisive.

Yet, Chinnery's analysis is far too simplistic. Although

⁷¹ Philip Chinnery, Air War in Vietnam, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1987), p.171.

⁷² Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.310.

sound on basic tactical premises, the analysis fails to take into account the wider strategic situation. American military initiatives were greatly restrained by the threat of Soviet or Chinese intervention in South-East Asia. Thus, the classical role of third-parties, as defined by Fred C. Ikle in Every War Must End, direct military intervention or even the threat of it, acted as an influence on the Johnson Administration.

In particular, the threat of Chinese intervention deeply alarmed President Johnson: he often spoke of the possibility of "another Korea" to his closest advisors.⁷³ There seems to be no doubt that Lyndon Johnson sincerely believed that Chinese, and possibly even Soviet, intervention would result if he allowed his field commanders to escalate the war.

Senior American military men, particularly General Westmoreland, have condemned President Johnson's decision to limit the war.⁷⁴ Yet, in retrospect, was Lyndon Johnson truly wrong? During this time period, 1965 to 1969, China was undergoing one of its most tumultuous periods of this century, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution was, in effect, a Chinese civil war in which factions of the Communist Party contested with one another for supremacy. This period remains very controversial and it is not clear what individual or individuals were in control at any particular time. In his insightful account of the

⁷³ Karnow, Vietnam, p.239.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.39.

People's Republic of China, The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng, Harrison Salisbury presents a compelling thesis: one of the Cultural Revolution's central objectives during this time period was to establish Mao's successor.⁷⁵ Thus, the Gang of Four was attempting to promote Yao Wenyuan as Mao's successor, while the Minister of Defence, Marshal Lin Biao, and Mao's chief secretary, Chen Boda, were enhancing their prospects.

Therefore, any ground incursions by American forces into Cambodia, Laos, or southern North Vietnam after the tactical victory of Tet might have resulted in Chinese intervention. Despite the fact that Mao probably did not want an extension of the war, there was the possibility that he could have lost control of the situation. Thus, if the American XXIV Provisional Corps, under Lieutenant-General William B. Rosson, (USA), entered the Laotian Panhandle to sever the Ho Chi Minh Trail in March of 1968, the Red Guards might have taken matters into their own hands. In addition, such a situation would certainly have been manipulated by the Gang of Four, Chen Boda, and Marshal Lin Biao for their own political agendas. Thus, the United States had to be extremely cautious regarding the role of China in South-East Asia.

The Soviet Union was much less of a threat, but nonetheless it was an important player. In the first months of 1968, the Soviet Pacific Fleet was on large-scale exercises

⁷⁵ Salisbury, The New Emperors, p.289-335.

in and north of the Sea of Japan with the Democratic Republic of Korea.⁷⁶ Although these naval exercises had probably been planned for months, judging by the logistical effort required to sustain them, the movements of the Soviet Pacific Fleet were a cause of concern to the Pentagon. If the Soviets had ever actually decided to strike at Japan or South Korea, there was no effective riposte the United States could have made apart from the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

The threat of Chinese or Soviet intervention in South-East Asia is closely related to another factor: the general weakness of American military power in the world. Since the Congress had passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August of 1964, the United States had been fighting an undeclared war in South-East Asia. However, the Johnson Administration had not taken the obvious action required to sustain the military build-up in Vietnam as well as maintain troop strength in other strategic regions of the world, notably Western Europe and North-East Asia: activation of the reserves. In order to bring troop strength up to 582,000 personnel by March of 1968, the Pentagon was forced "to strip" personnel away from the 7th Army in West Germany, the 8th Army in South Korea, and the vital reserves stationed in the United States. By 1968, the 7th and 8th armies existed on paper only. In addition, in the event of a crisis, the United States Army only possessed a

⁷⁶ Ian Beckett, The March of Communism-1917 to 1984, (London:Bison, 1984), p.154.

single combat-ready division that could be deployed immediately--the 82nd Airborne.⁷⁷

The fact that the United States military had reached "imperial overstretch" was demonstrated by events on the Korean Peninsula in January of 1968. On January 23, 1968, North Korean commando units seized the American intelligence-gathering ship, USS Pueblo, in international waters.⁷⁸ This incident not only humiliated the Johnson Administration, but it demonstrated that the United States was incapable of decisive military action against North Korea. To complicate matters even more, the openly hostile action by North Korea was accompanied by a massive military build-up between Pyongyang and the cease-fire line of 1953. Throughout late January, heavy skirmishing took place between the Republic of Korea's Army and the North Korean People's Army.⁷⁹ As South Korean President Park Chung-Hee placed his military forces on a war footing, American military weakness became painfully clear by two facts. The first was the decision by the South Korean President to consider withdrawing the large South Korean contingent in South Vietnam (almost 49,500 men--

⁷⁷ Shelby L. Stanton, The Rise and Fall of An American Army, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1987), p.7.

⁷⁸ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.313.

⁷⁹ General Richard G. Stillwell, (USA-Retired), "Introduction" to The Modern US War Machine, edited by Ray Bonds, (New York:Arco, 1987), p.15

organized into two infantry divisions and a marine brigade).⁸⁰ Second, in the event of a war on the Korean peninsula, the United States would have been virtually powerless to influence the fighting on the ground. The two American divisions stationed in South Korea, the 2nd Mechanized and the 7th Infantry, were barely at 40 percent strength.⁸¹ In addition, there were no available reserves to commit to South Korea in the event of a conflict.

If the situation in South Korea was alarming to the Administration and the Pentagon, then the developing crisis over Berlin was even more so. For several months, the Four Power Talks had been deadlocked over such simple issues as West German postal delivery to West Berlin. In early December, the Soviet Union adopted a much more intransigent position. The new hard-line negotiating strategy was followed by a build-up of the forward-deployed units of the Red Army.⁸² As elite Soviet units were moved closer to Berlin, Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Andrei Grechko began to make extremely bellicose statements.⁸³

For the United States, a new Berlin crisis could not have come at a worse time. Not since 1948 had the American

⁸⁰ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.313.

⁸¹ Stillwell, "Introduction" to The US War Machine, p.15

⁸² Beckett, The March of Communism, p.161.

⁸³ Karen Dawisha, Eastern Europe, Gorbachev, and Reform: The Great Challenge, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.295.

military presence in Western Europe been so weak. In a top-secret memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General J.L. Polk, (USA), commanding officer of the 7th Army, declared that he did not have a single division fit for combat.⁸⁴ If the forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organization were to move against West Berlin, the United States European Command could take no effective action apart from the tactical use of nuclear weapons.

Therefore, by the winter of 1968, the American military was stretched dangerously thin. The war in Vietnam had consumed virtually every American ground unit which was available. As a result, the United States was left in an extremely tenuous position, strategically. Indeed, General Bruce R. Palmer, Jr., (USA), who served as Vice Chief of Staff of the United States Army from 1968 to 1973, has written that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were primarily concerned with this strategic vulnerability, not the war in Vietnam itself, during February and March of 1968.⁸⁵

Thus, in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, President Johnson and his senior advisors had to face some very harsh realities. Although the American and South Vietnamese forces had won decisive victories, any attempt to exploit this tactical success, by escalating the conflict, risked Chinese

⁸⁴ Stanton, The Rise and Fall of An American Army, p.7.

⁸⁵ General Bruce R. Palmer, Jr., (USA-Retired), The 25 Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam, (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1989), p.187.

and/or Soviet intervention. If either of the Communist giants was to intervene in the conflict, American strategic interests elsewhere in the world would be in great peril.

The vulnerability of American strategic interests was recognized by the Pentagon, however. General Earle G. Wheeler, (USA), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, (1964-1970), realized that the reserves had to be activated to allow the United States to honour its other commitments. He prevailed upon General Westmoreland to make a dramatic request for an additional 206,000 troops.⁸⁶ Of this number, however, only a fraction were meant for deployment to Vietnam. The purpose of this troop call-up was meant to strengthen American forces in South Korea and West Germany. President Johnson must have been surprised by the dramatic request from General Westmoreland. If the reserves were activated, the social fabric of the country would be further strained, while the resulting inflationary pressures might lead to the collapse of the dollar on world markets. Yet, if the request was rejected, would the American position in Vietnam, or elsewhere, become strategically untenable? To study these vital questions, President Johnson ordered a full-scale review of Vietnam policy to be conducted by a special committee, chaired by incoming Secretary of Defence Clark Clifford.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Karnow, Vietnam, p.529."

⁸⁷ Melvin Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, (Camden, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p.136.

Clark Clifford was a natural choice to replace McNamara at the Pentagon and to conduct the fundamental review of the Administration's policy in Vietnam. A respected Washington attorney, Clifford had strong lobbying influence in Congress. He also had close connections with the captains of industry, including the giant defence contractors. In addition, Clifford was a close personal friend of Lyndon Johnson's, and was one of the President's three closest confidants along with Abe Fortas and Secretary of State Dean Rusk.⁸⁸ The President undoubtedly expected his old friend to be a very vigorous war manager. Indeed, Secretary Rusk had described Mr. Clifford as "one of the biggest hawks in Washington."⁸⁹

The special committee, that included Clifford, Rusk, National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow, Assistant Secretary of State Paul Warnke, General Wheeler, retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler, and outgoing Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, began its deliberations in the last week of February.⁹⁰ Within a week, the committee, especially its chairman, became deeply pessimistic about the American role in Vietnam. In the last week of March, Secretary Clifford would shock the President by advising him to reject Westmoreland's troop request and to move towards deescalation.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.141.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.136.

As a whole, the committee's conclusions were shaped by the strategic situation facing the United States, globally, and the perilous state of the American economy. The first factor has been fully analyzed and its relevance is quite obvious. The second factor, however, was equally important to the members of the committee. In the literature, it has not gained the attention it deserves.

By February of 1968, the United States was facing the "dollar gold crisis." This financial crisis was a result of the American dollar being pegged to the gold standard, and all other major currencies, in turn, being pegged to the American dollar (the Bretton Woods System of 1944). Since the summer of 1965, however, the very stability of the American dollar had been shaken by what economists have called the "double whammy"--the war in Vietnam and the social programs of the Great Society. The resulting inflationary pressures had been exacerbated by the refusal of the Administration to raise taxes. By 1968, the United States was running dangerously large current account deficits.

A financial crisis emerged at the end of February when Senator Jacob Javits of New York called for an end to the gold pool. In a panic, almost \$118 million was withdrawn from the pool in only two days.⁹¹ By March 4, Treasury Secretary Henry Fowler warned the President that the gold rush and flight from the dollar were serious and could worsen quickly,

⁹¹ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.314.

with a gold embargo leading to "exchange rate wars and trading blocs with harmful political as well as economic effects."⁹² Amazingly, for the next few weeks, the war in Vietnam was not the top priority for the President. Instead, as noted by one of Johnson's biographers, Doris Kearns: "The specter of 1929 haunted him daily. He worried that if the economy collapsed, history would subject Lyndon Johnson to endless abuse."⁹³

The monetary crisis would worsen. On March 11, banks rushed the gold pool and once it suspended operations on March 14, almost \$1 billion had been withdrawn. Treasury economists calculated that once operations were started up again, another \$1 billion in gold would be withdrawn on the first day.⁹⁴ Lyndon Johnson and Henry Fowler were only too painfully aware of the consequences of such a depletion of the gold reserves. President Johnson wrote to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson that "these financial disorders--if not promptly and firmly overcome--can profoundly damage the political relations between Europe and America and set in motion forces like those which disintegrated the Western world between 1929 and 1933."⁹⁵

Although the fact that the Tet Offensive occurred just a month before the "dollar-gold crisis" was only a coincidence,

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

it was highly symbolic. The symbolism of the situation could not have been lost to the members of the committee studying Westmoreland's troop request, particularly Robert McNamara, a former President of the Ford Motor Company and future President of the World Bank, Secretary of the Treasury Fowler, and above all, the Secretary of Defence. Mr. Clifford had very close ties to the world of big business. He was only too aware how seriously the captains of industry viewed the strain on the economy from the war in Vietnam.

The "dollar-gold crisis" was one of the determining factors prompting the Johnson Administration to adopt a policy of deescalation in Vietnam. Yet, strangely, the financial crisis that was a leading factor in Washington's decision to deescalate the war and to seek to enter into peace talks with Hanoi has been neglected by the literature. The only work found from the literature surveyed which analyzed the economic crisis in any great detail was Gabriel Kolko's Anatomy of a War. Kolko considers the "dollar-gold crisis" of March, 1968, to have been the single greatest influence on the President's dramatic announcement of March 31, 1968. After his extensive research, Kolko concluded that :

[I]t was the gold and dollar crisis that created the most sustained and irresistible pressures on Washington...The gold and dollar crisis colored all of Washington's thoughts on responses to the precarious military situation in South Vietnam.⁹⁶

However, the exact thoughts and attitudes of the decision-

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.313.

makers in Washington on the effects of the fiscal and monetary crisis to the situation in Vietnam have not been comprehensively researched. This area remains one of further potential research.

Although the members of Clifford's special committee were clearly trying to focus primarily on strategic and economic questions regarding the possibility of escalation in Vietnam, there is no doubt that they were at least aware of the anti-war sentiment in the country. Indeed, the National Security Adviser, Walt Rostow, who was probably the most "hawkish" individual on the committee, recognized the importance of popular opinion, when on February 12, he told the President: The North Vietnamese audacity "shook U.S. public opinion."⁹⁷ Thus, it is obvious that the members of the committee did not make their deliberations in some sort of vacuum, unconscious of the lack of support for the war.

The powerful chairman of the committee, who would move the Johnson Administration away from escalation more than any other individual, was especially concerned about the decline in elite support for the war. Ever since joining the Administration, Clark Clifford had been observing the attitudes of corporate leaders towards the war. What he heard from his colleagues must have alarmed him. The monetary crisis of March of 1968 had badly frightened American bankers and industrialists. These individuals were convinced that

⁹⁷ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.140.

further escalation by the Administration could lead to a massive run on the dollar and the depleted gold reserves of the Treasury. If such an event were to occur, the consequences could be fatal for the American, as well as the world economy. For Secretary Clifford, the attitudes of the business community seem to have played a critical role. He recognized that the foreign policy consensus which had existed since the Truman Administration had been fragmented when he stated:

What seems not to be understood is that major elements of the national constituency--the business community, the press, the churches, the professional groups, college presidents, students, and most of the intellectual community--have turned against this war.⁹⁸

In the wake of the Tet Offensive, anti-war sentiment was an important influence on the Johnson Administration. The single greatest influence of the Tet Offensive was the political effect it had in the United States. North Vietnam's ability to launch a coordinated, countrywide offensive in the South convinced many Americans that the war could not be won. President Johnson, who had been portraying the ground war in South Vietnam far too optimistically, had his credibility shattered. On the eve of the Tet Offensive, Johnson's approval rating on his conduct of the war stood at 40 percent.⁹⁹ At the end of February, his approval rating had

⁹⁸ As cited in Small, p.130.

⁹⁹ Karnow, Vietnam, p.341.

plummeted to 26 percent.¹⁰⁰ Neither Lyndon Johnson's popularity with the American people nor his Presidency would ever recover from the Tet Offensive.

Two dramatic events would succeed in demonstrating to the President and his advisors that popular support for the war effort had collapsed. The first occurred on February 27, 1968, with the "defection" of CBS news anchorman Walter Cronkite. Walter Cronkite was America's most respected and influential broadcast journalist. In what was the first "television war," Cronkite was as important as any opinion maker in American society. President Johnson respected Walter Cronkite and considered him to be "fair."¹⁰¹ Cronkite's ardent support of the Administration's Vietnam policy up to January 31, 1968, was considered crucial by Lyndon Johnson in maintaining middle class support.¹⁰²

However, Walter Cronkite was badly shaken by the Tet Offensive. On national television on January 31, Cronkite, shocked by the images of heavy street fighting in Saigon, exclaimed: "Jesus Christ! I thought we were winning this war!"¹⁰³ Cronkite, like most every other American, was utterly caught off-guard by the Communist Tet Offensive. He decided to spend two weeks in South Vietnam at the end of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.138.

¹⁰² Karnow, Vietnam, p.340.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

February to survey the progress of the war for himself.

Cronkite returned to national primetime television on the evening of February 27, with a rare editorial scheduled regarding his recent trip to Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ This editorial would be one of the most important media events of 1968, a fact symbolized by the President's request to his aides that they tape the newscast for him. In his editorial, Cronkite declared that the war was not going well and that the Administration's policy in Vietnam had clearly failed.¹⁰⁵ Watching the taped newscast the next day, President Johnson stated: "I have lost middle America."¹⁰⁶

There can be little doubt that Walter Cronkite's editorial was a significant "turning point" in the popular attitudes towards the war. Up to Tet of 1968, Walter Cronkite had been a very loyal supporter of the President and of the war against "Communist aggression." Cronkite was able to influence tens of millions of Americans in a much more direct way than the editors of The New York Times or The Washington Post. The impact of Cronkite's dramatic editorial has been best observed by Dr. Melvin Small:

...[I]f Cronkite, a moderate and patriot, was turning on his policies, then he [Lyndon Johnson] must be losing millions of like-minded Americans as well. Johnson, who had "enormous respect" for Cronkite, always had considered him "fair." Now

¹⁰⁴ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.138.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Karnow, Vietnam, p.342.

this fair-minded opinion leader opposed him in what was a "turning point" of the period.¹⁰⁷

Clearly, both the President and his Administration were badly shaken by Cronkite's dramatic change of views.

The second major event which convincingly evinced the strong anti-war sentiment in the country was the Democratic primary in New Hampshire on March 12. As expected, Lyndon Johnson won the primary, but it was a "Pyrrhic" victory. President Johnson had faced an extremely strong, and utterly unexpected, challenge from an obscure senator, Gene McCarthy.¹⁰⁸ McCarthy's solid performance in the primary--42 percent of the registered delegates--clearly revealed substantial discontent within the Democratic Party towards the Administration and strong anti-war sentiment. The President and his advisors were deeply alarmed by McCarthy's strong showing.

On March 16, a far more dangerous threat emerged against the President politically: Robert F. Kennedy announced his decision to seek his Party's nomination for the Presidency. Robert Kennedy was the only Democrat that President Johnson feared as a political foe. If any Democrat could unseat an incumbent Democratic President, it was Robert Kennedy. Kennedy enjoyed an excellent reputation, a charismatic personality and great family wealth. He was truly a

¹⁰⁷ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.138.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

formidable opponent, as recognized by President Johnson:

And then the final straw. The thing I feared from the first day of my Presidency was actually coming true. Robert Kennedy had openly announced his intention to reclaim the throne.¹⁰⁹

Thus, Lyndon Johnson must have felt very beleaguered when Clifford's special committee presented its conclusions at the end of March. The President must have been rather surprised that such a hawkish Secretary of Defence would recommend deescalation. To resolve any doubts that he may have held about the committee's conclusions and recommendations, the Secretary of Defence advised the President to convene the State Department's Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam--the Wise Men.

The Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam was literally a collection of America's most prominent public servants, military, political, and economic. Under the chairmanship of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1949-1953), the group included George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Douglas Dillon, Cyrus Vance, Arthur Dean, John McCloy, General of the Army Omar Bradley, General Matthew Ridgway, General Maxwell Taylor, Robert Murphy, Henry Cabot Lodge, Abe Fortas, and Arthur Goldberg.¹¹⁰ In their luncheon with the President on March 26, the Wise Men argued that the country could not afford to

¹⁰⁹ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.317.

¹¹⁰ Karnow, Vietnam, p.474.

prosecute the war indefinitely.¹¹¹ Two themes dominated the arguments of the Wise Men: divisions in American society and the general erosion of support for the war. The conclusions, presented by Chairman Acheson, supported Secretary Clifford's recommendation of deescalation. Yet, for President Johnson and his more hawkish advisors, the conclusions of the Wise Men were anticlimactic. As noted by Melvin Small:

Clifford portrayed the Wise Men as the representatives and interpreters of the national "jury"--on Vietnam policy, the media, and the public. The verdict was in, and this time the Wise Men could not ignore it. Johnson finally accepted the verdict at the eleventh hour, a turnabout that surprised even Clifford.¹¹²

The months of February and March, 1968, for Lyndon Johnson, were as arduous as any period in this century. At the end of March, the Johnson Administration realized that its policies in Vietnam no longer had any substantial support. The course of action adopted by the President was to begin deescalation of the conflict. This decision was announced to the American people during a national television address on March 31 in which the President also declared that he would not seek reelection.

This chapter has analyzed Washington's response to the Communist Tet Offensive and the factors that led to the dramatic policy shift of the United States. Thus, this chapter has addressed the first fundamental question raised in

¹¹¹ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.147.

¹¹² Ibid.

the introduction: What were the factors that led the two parties to enter into the Paris Peace Talks in 1968, and subsequently, to conclude them in 1973. The three catalysts identified in the introduction- military reversal/stalemate, the threat of domestic instability, and the international balance of power- all acted as influences on the Johnson Administration, leading to the March 31 announcement to begin a partial bombing halt over North Vietnam and to seek to enter into peace talks with Hanoi. None of the catalysts was truly dominant in the Johnson Administration's drastic policy shift. Instead, the catalysts must be understood to be interacting with one another.

Shortly after President Johnson's offer to initiate peace talks, the North Vietnamese foreign ministry, through its delegation at the United Nations (UN) in New York, replied that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was prepared to enter into such talks. On May 13, the prenegotiating stage of the Paris Peace Talks would commence with the American delegation led by Averell W. Harriman and the North Vietnamese delegation headed by Xuan Thuy. This stage of the Paris Peace Talks would be particularly arduous, ending only on November 1.

To understand the motives that led Hanoi to enter into the Paris Peace Talks, it is first necessary to comprehend the nature of the Tet Offensive. The Tet Offensive was designed not only to win a decisive military victory, but also to end

a political stalemate in the United States and, to a lesser extent, South Vietnam.¹¹³ The Johnson Administration had to be forced to confront the limitations of American political, economic, and military power in Vietnam. As noted by Gabriel Kolko:

It would shock the United States out of its complacency. The Party considered this the key to the future of the entire conflict, for without an unlimited American commitment, the Party could expect victory in the not-too-distant future.¹¹⁴

Thus, entry into negotiations would be a continuation of the conflict, forcing the United States to make concessions that would ultimately benefit the Revolution.

Yet, Hanoi was also forced to enter into negotiations for more immediate reasons. These reasons correspond to the first and second catalysts identified in the introduction. Both Party and military leaders had been utterly shocked by the heavy casualties incurred in the South. Even Gabriel Kolko, a harsh critic of American policy in Vietnam, notes that Communist casualties were considered to have been "higher than many Senior Party leaders thought tolerable."¹¹⁵ Particularly alarming to the leaders in Hanoi must have been the decimation of the ranks of the highly motivated and trained cadres, especially in the cities. Therefore, both Party and military leaders realized that a "breathing space"

¹¹³ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.304.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.310.

was needed to recover from the heavy casualties incurred. Indeed, the seriousness of the Communist military situation in 1968 would later be revealed by two facts: Viet Cong main force units would never again play a decisive military role, and, even in 1975, the Party's presence in the cities of South Vietnam was at best marginal.

The influence of the second catalyst discussed in the introduction--domestic instability or the threat of it--was also a consideration for Hanoi. By April of 1968, Hanoi had been at war with the United States for nearly four years. The American strategic bombing campaign, Operation Rolling Thunder, had succeeded in destroying the infrastructure of the DRV. Divisions would emerge within the Politburo over the best way to conduct the war.

A faction of the Politburo, led by senior Party theorist Truong Chinh, argued that the time had come to focus on "socialist reconstruction" of the North.¹¹⁶ At the time, North Vietnam was ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).¹¹⁷ The "moderates" within the Politburo, Truong Chinh and Pham Hung, were able to forge a consensus among their colleagues, particularly the "neutral " faction, which comprised the President of the Democratic Republic, Ho Chi Minh, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Pham Van Dong, and the

¹¹⁶ Doyle, Lipsman, and Maitland, The North, p.164.

¹¹⁷ Lanning and Cragg, Inside the VC and the NVA, p.331.

Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, that entry into the Paris Peace Talks, in return for a complete bombing halt, would benefit the Revolution.¹¹⁸ Hanoi would be given valuable time to replenish its manpower reserves in the South, strengthen its supply lines in eastern Cambodia and the Laotian Panhandle, and, no less important, divert a fraction of Chinese and Soviet aid to economic development programs. At the same time, drawn-out negotiations in Paris would give the United States the opportunity to begin troop reductions. Because of the pressures of American public opinion, Hanoi could reasonably expect Johnson's successor to be essentially forced to reduce American troop strength.

Thus, the analytical framework presented in the introduction explains Hanoi's decision to accept the American offer to open peace talks. The heavy losses incurred during Tet and the weak state of the economy both called for reduced military activity in the South, and above all, an end to Operation Rolling Thunder. Clearly, the "moderate" faction of the Politburo succeeded in, at least tempering the hawkish views of Lao Dong Party First Secretary Le Duan and his cohorts, Le Duc Tho and Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap. After Tet, a consensus had been established in the North Vietnamese Politburo that entry into peace negotiations, in return for a complete bombing halt, would be beneficial to Hanoi's long term objectives. Yet at this stage, the decision

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

to enter into the Paris Peace Talks rested with the Johnson Administration. The rapid reply given by the North Vietnamese to Johnson's offer to initiate peace negotiations indicates that the Politburo had decided upon this course several months prior to April of 1968. Thus, impetus to the pre-negotiating stage was provided by the Johnson Administration's full-scale review of its policy in Vietnam.

PART III: INTERLUDE

CHAPTER IV: STALEMATE BOTH POLITICALLY AND MILITARILY
1968-70

The most notable characteristic of the Paris Peace Talks, which convened on November 1, 1968, was their duration. For almost fifty-one months, the delegations from the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and the National Liberation Front, engaged in often futile negotiations, focusing an inordinate amount of time on pedantic points. Indeed, it can be argued that the only substantial progress in the Paris Peace Talks was made after October 8, 1972. Nonetheless, during this time, the catalysts identified in the introduction were influencing the two principal players in the negotiations, the United States and the DRV, gradually moving them towards a resolution of the conflict. The four historical "snapshots" isolated between 1968 and 1973 are especially important as the intransigent position of Hanoi was gradually altered. Between two of these snapshots, President Johnson's dramatic announcement on March 31, 1968, that the United States was imposing a partial bombing halt over the DRV, and the incursions into Cambodia and Laos, in April-June of 1970 and February-March of 1971, respectively to sever North Vietnamese supply lines, there was a long period of perceived stalemate, both politically and

militarily.

However, during the time period under consideration, March 31, 1968, to April 20, 1970, events in Washington, Saigon, Hanoi, and Paris, were fluid, not static. Important changes were influencing the relative balance of forces in Vietnam, and consequently, the peace process. Although none of these events was as dramatic as the "historical snapshots," nevertheless, the catalysts were clearly influencing the major actors in the Paris Peace Talks.

The purpose of this chapter is to act as a "bridge" between chapters three and five. By briefly explaining, and then analyzing, the major events of this period, notably the Presidential election of 1968, the policy of the Nixon Administration towards the war in Vietnam, and, perhaps one of the most controversial episodes of the war, the secret bombings of Cambodia, this chapter will survey the influence of the catalysts on Washington and Hanoi. Although there was no dramatic movement towards a resolution of the conflict, these catalysts were, nonetheless, having an extremely important influence on Hanoi and Washington.

Senior American military men, such as Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, (USN), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1970-1974), have charged that Johnson had no clear war aims in Vietnam. In the literature, there is a consensus to support this view: American war aims as formulated by Lyndon Johnson were rather nebulous. As noted by David Halberstam, when General Matthew B. Ridgway asked the Vice-President what

General Westmoreland's instructions were, concerning war aims, Vice-President Humphrey merely stated: "That's a good question."¹¹⁹ It is crucial, however, to understand that President Johnson never expected the war to last longer than 1965: Operation Rolling Thunder was intended to bring Hanoi to the bargaining table. Lyndon Johnson's only vague guideline in Vietnam was to control Communism: he was committed to assisting the South Vietnamese to "win their contest against the externally directed and supported communist conspiracy."¹²⁰

For five months, after March 1968, Washington and Hanoi had conducted talks to begin peace talks. Hanoi had refused to agree to peace talks until a complete bombing halt was announced, while Washington had maintained that peace talks had to precede the bombing halt. The American negotiators, Averell W. Harriman and Cyrus Vance, had put forward four critical conditions which would allow a complete bombing halt:

- 1) The commencement of the peace talks, including representatives of South Vietnam, a few days after the bombing halt;
- 2) An end to all North Vietnamese military activity in the Demilitarized Zone;
- 3) An end to large-scale attacks and the firing of rockets on the cities of South Vietnam, and
- 4) Unarmed American reconnaissance flights must be allowed over North Vietnam.¹²¹

Hanoi would utterly refuse to agree to these conditions.

¹¹⁹ Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, p.270.

¹²⁰ Karnow, Vietnam, p.351

¹²¹ Palmer, The 25 Year War, p.92.

Nonetheless, on November 1, 1968, President Johnson announced a complete bombing halt over North Vietnam and the start of Paris Peace Talks. There is substantial reason to think that Johnson's action was a brazen political move. By announcing the start of the Paris Peace Talks, Johnson drastically improved the chances of the Democratic candidate, Hubert Humphrey, of being elected President. The last minute concessions of the United States, in allowing the restrictions to become "informal understandings," could have been made any time during the preceding months. The only practical result of President Johnson's speech of November 1, 1968, was to make a "cliff-hanger out of the Presidential election," as argued by Richard Nixon.¹²²

The Paris Peace Talks in Johnson's last months in the Oval Office, from November, 1968, to January, 1969, failed to produce a truly substantive negotiating session. The American and North Vietnamese delegations, headed by Averell W. Harriman and Xuan Thuy respectively, reached a bizarre impasse which would last for ten weeks over the shape of the tables at the negotiating sessions.¹²³ This strange obstacle concerned the status of the National Liberation Front at the negotiations. Hanoi demanded that the representatives from the National Liberation Front be granted the status of a separate negotiating delegation. Washington and Saigon

¹²² Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.71.

¹²³ Ibid, p.73.

countered that the National Liberation Front was not autonomous from the DRV, so its delegates should be included with the official negotiating team from Hanoi. Only when the parties agreed to oval shaped tables was the impasse overcome. The first episode of the Paris Peace Talks is very relevant to this study: the North Vietnamese tactic of delaying the Talks along strange procedural lines was clearly revealed.

When Richard Nixon was sworn in as the President of the United States, there were nearly 543,000 American servicemen in South Vietnam.¹²⁴ The Paris Peace Talks had not produced a single substantive negotiating session in nearly three months. Such was the magnitude of the foreign policy disaster Nixon had to deal with from previous Administrations. Yet, as correctly noted by Henry Kissinger, critics of the Nixon Administration would largely focus on the current Administration's policies, while failing to realize that it was the Johnson Administration which had committed the United States to a land war in Asia.

Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had much more tangible war aims than Lyndon Johnson. The United States had, above all, to extricate itself from the morass in Vietnam. Vietnam had sapped American strength and initiative. Critical issues, such as Sino-American relations, had been atrophied by the Vietnam commitment. The United States had to disengage from

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.94.

this quagmire. Yet, Nixon and Kissinger were committed to the survival of South Vietnam. If South Vietnam were betrayed, the Americans would lose a great deal of credibility and prestige. The lives of 40,000 servicemen would have been lost in vain.

The Nixon Administration had to establish a strong negotiating position, literally, from scratch. Despite the fact that it was the Johnson Administration which had first initiated the Peace Talks, there was no comprehensive American bargaining position when Nixon took office. The only extant bargaining position which existed was the Manila Formula of October 24, 1966, which stated that :[A]llied forces... shall be withdrawn, after close consultation, as the other side withdraws its forces to the north, ceases infiltration, and the level of violence thus subsides. These forces will be withdrawn as soon as possible and not later than six months after the above conditions have been fulfilled.¹²⁵

In such a complicated negotiating forum as the Paris Peace Talks, it is not surprising that it took almost a year for a firm American position to be established. The basic American strategy was to force Hanoi to compromise at the bargaining table by making the continuation of its war effort prohibitive. To accomplish this objective, Kissinger would adopt the "two track" negotiating strategy, which would attempt to separate political issues from military ones. Yet, Kissinger had to first establish a comprehensive negotiating position before substantive talks could begin.

The first major American initiative was the President's

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.91.

nationally televised address of May 14, 1969. Nixon proposed an eight-point program to guide the American delegation in Paris, now headed by Henry Cabot Lodge. This new policy called for mutual withdrawals from South Vietnam by the United States and North Vietnam, participation by the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam's political process, free elections under international supervision, and an internationally supervised cease-fire.¹²⁶ For the first time ever, a coherent American negotiating position had been put forward. Yet, the North Vietnamese categorically rejected it.

The Administration's attention soon turned to unilateral American troop withdrawals. Nixon had entered office with a commitment to a "secret plan" for ending the war. For domestic political purposes, Nixon was virtually required to continue the deescalation of the American war effort and to announce even token troop withdrawals. The Administration hoped (futilely) that these troop withdrawals would increase public support for the troops that remained.¹²⁷ In addition, the ARVN would be expected to carry a greater burden of the war effort, thus reducing American casualties.

Domestic political pressures would be the genesis of a new American strategy: Vietnamization. By providing advanced training and logistical support, the United States hoped to establish an ARVN that was largely self-sufficient, such as

¹²⁶ Samuel Lipsman and Edward Doyle, The north, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983), p.98.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

the military of South Korea, or even completely sufficient with its own resources, such as the Israeli Army. Strangely, the strongest advocate of Vietnamization was Secretary of Defence Melvin R. Laird. Exactly how such an intelligent man as Mr. Laird could become such a strong advocate of this policy when the commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam, General Creighton W. Abrams, (USA) and the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Pacific Command, Admiral John S. McCain, (USN), were opposed to it, must remain a mystery. Laird was backed by Secretary of State William Rogers in support of Vietnamization while Henry Kissinger reluctantly agreed.¹²⁸

As clearly expounded by Henry Kissinger, Vietnamization was meant to be a "public relations coup."¹²⁹ Vietnamization was foremost a strategy influenced by domestic political pressures. Nixon wanted to be the President who would achieve a "peace with honour." Yet, Vietnamization would lead to serious consequences in the Paris Peace Talks and domestically.

The policy of Vietnamization would completely undermine the American position in Paris that there had to be mutual withdrawal. At the Midway Conference in June of 1969, Nixon had unilaterally announced the withdrawal of 25,000 American

¹²⁸ Kissinger, White House Years, p.240.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

servicemen without any similar concession by Hanoi.¹³⁰ Thus, there was no incentive for Hanoi to make concessions. The United States was withdrawing from Vietnam. Clearly, North Vietnamese Defence Minister General Vo Nguyen Giap's argument that the Americans lacked the willpower for a sustained land war was being confirmed.¹³¹

If the Administration calculated that a minor withdrawal of American troops would alleviate domestic political pressure, it was clearly incorrect. As Kissinger very much feared, the first troop withdrawal was merely a "salted peanut."¹³² The troop withdrawal announcements would gain their own momentum. Once one troop withdrawal was completed, the domestic pressure for further withdrawals would become unbearable. This fact was revealed by Nixon in September, when the original troop withdrawal of 25,000 men, augmented by an additional increment of 35,000 men, allowed the draft calls for that year to be cancelled.¹³³ Meanwhile, the Pentagon was preparing plans for the withdrawal of an additional 260,000 servicemen.

North Vietnam's War Aims

The ultimate objectives of the North Vietnamese war effort during this period have become very clear from events

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.243.

¹³¹ John Morocco, Rain of Fire, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983), p.82.

¹³² Kissinger, White House Years, p.

¹³³ Kissinger, White House Years, p.247.

since 1975. The reunification of Vietnam was obviously the single most important objective of the Democratic Republic. However, equally important was the establishment of Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina. The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 was clear proof of Hanoi's intentions. Hanoi's ultimate aim was the consolidation of a regional power bloc to contest its old nemesis, China.

Ho Chi Minh's entire life had been dedicated to Vietnamese nationalism. For sixteen years, Hanoi had waged a vicious war against the American-backed regime in Saigon to achieve these twin goals. The people of North Vietnam were forced to make great sacrifices for the reunification of their country, which by any perspective was a noble goal. Perhaps the most salient characteristic of the North Vietnamese war effort was the level of devastating casualties. In 1988, American scholar Stanley Karnow asked Senior General Giap the total casualties suffered by the Democratic Republic. Giap merely shrugged and stated: "We still don't know."¹³⁴ Later, an aide to Senior General Giap would estimate total casualties of at least one million.¹³⁵

Thus, the war effort had become critical to maintaining the legitimacy of the Lao Dong Party. If the leaders of the Democratic Republic were to accept a settlement in Paris, it was absolutely crucial that the great sacrifices of the

¹³⁴ Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, Inside the VC and the NVA, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1992), p.21.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Vietnamese people not seem to have been in vain. Therefore, a "peace with honour" was just as important to the Central Committee of the Party as it was to the Nixon Administration. The dilemma facing the North Vietnamese leadership has been neatly summarized by Mitchell:

The general rule seems to be that the higher the sacrifices involved, the more people will feel that some significant gains must be achieved in the final settlement to make up for all they endured. The more prolonged the conflict, the more difficult it becomes for the leaders to accept anything short of a significant improvement on the pre-conflict situation as a final settlement.¹³⁶

Thus, the senior leadership of the Central Committee recognized that it could not be seen as "betraying the Revolution" by the rank and file of the Lao Dong Party and, above all, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). This factor, perhaps more than any other, largely explains why the Paris Peace Talks dragged on from November, 1968 to January, 1973. Therefore, the North Vietnamese negotiating strategy in Paris had to aim towards these ultimate objectives.

Hanoi's Negotiating Strategy

Hanoi's military and negotiating strategies were thus working very well. To Hanoi, the political struggle and the military struggle were both a part of greater strategy. The negotiating strategy adopted by Hanoi was foremost a form of psychological warfare.

Hanoi had succeeded in committing Washington to ending the strategic air campaign against North Vietnam, Operation

¹³⁶ Mitchell, The Structure of International Conflict, p.180.

Rolling Thunder, in return for only agreeing to the start of the Paris Peace Talks. Washington had gained no concrete concessions from Hanoi. The fact that intransigence would characterize Hanoi's strategy was demonstrated by the impasse over the shape of the negotiating tables.

For Hanoi, the Paris Peace Talks would provide a propaganda forum. The North Vietnamese would put forward the mirage of their dedication to a negotiated settlement. Yet, the American media would always blame Richard Nixon for his iniquity and failure to conclude the Peace Talks, despite the fact that the United States was announcing troop withdrawals and offering unilateral concessions, without any reciprocity from North Vietnam.

The basic position of Hanoi in the Paris Peace Talks was expounded by Xuan Thuy in a secret meeting with Henry Kissinger on August 4, 1969. There could be no separation of the military and political issues.¹³⁷ The military solution required the unconditional withdrawal of American troops. However, a military solution was meaningless without a political solution--the removal of President Nguyen Van Thieu(1967-1975) and Vice-President Nguyen Cao Ky(1967-1971) and the establishment of a coalition government dominated by the Communists.¹³⁸ In other words, the war would not end and the American prisoners of war would be held captive until the

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.316.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Thieu government was removed.

In this context, Kissinger's "two track" negotiating strategy of separating the political and military issues would be meaningless if the North Vietnamese refused to compromise. The United States made major concessions, such as agreeing to a unilateral withdrawal, concerning a military solution, but North Vietnam refused to change its position. Hanoi's basic strategy rested on the concept of time.¹³⁹ Anti-war sentiment would eventually force the United States to make these concessions. The United States was pulling out of South Vietnam. North Vietnam would only have to bide its time until there was no longer an American combat presence to support the ARVN. In a worst case scenario for the Americans, North Vietnam could overrun South Vietnam and still hold American prisoners-of-war!

In retrospect, North Vietnam's war aims were crystal clear to any observer. American war aims were very nebulous under President Johnson. Nixon would formulate much clearer war aims, but his strategy had a fundamental contradiction: the need to withdraw American ground forces because of domestic political pressure and the need to give Vietnamization time to work.

The Nixon Administration clearly faced a desperate situation in Vietnam upon its inauguration: the Paris Peace Talks had failed to provide a single substantive negotiating

¹³⁹ Lipsman and Doyle, Fighting for Time, p.59.

session, American casualties were totalling 250 servicemen a week, and the nation was seriously divided. Yet, Richard Nixon was determined to avoid a disgraceful withdrawal from South Vietnam. The President was very skeptical about the utility of the Paris Peace Talks.¹⁴⁰ He believed that Hanoi would only make significant concessions if unbearable military pressure was brought to bear. To this end, Nixon in March of 1969 ordered a major escalation in the strategic air campaign against Hanoi's lines of communications in eastern Cambodia. The President's dramatic escalation of the war was a result of two factors: North Vietnamese intransigence in Paris and the fundamental contradiction between Vietnamization and American domestic priorities.

When Nixon took office, he was determined to rejuvenate the Paris Peace Talks. The delaying tactics used by North Vietnam in Paris were complicated by a new factor: a major People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) buildup was underway in the Cambodian sanctuaries.¹⁴¹ The President was convinced that bold action against this buildup would be an effective American initiative: "I think a very definite change of policy toward Cambodia probably should be one of the first orders of business when we get in."¹⁴² The North Vietnamese Politburo had to understand that the United States wanted peace, but

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Kissinger, White House Years, p.113.

¹⁴² Ibid.

not a peace without honour. An effective military operation would accomplish this goal much quicker than any other expedient.

Nixon and Kissinger have been much maligned for the air strikes in Cambodia, known as Operation Menu. Yet Operation Menu was the Nixon Administration's reaction to an escalation in the war by North Vietnam. On February 23, 1969, the PAVN launched a countrywide offensive. American casualties in the first week of the offensive totalled 453 servicemen; South Vietnamese casualties were nearly the equivalent of an airborne battalion.¹⁴³ President Nixon was infuriated: the North Vietnamese had refused to bargain in good faith for nearly five months, while the United States had deferred military action against the Cambodian sanctuaries.

The Mini-Tet Offensive of 1969 was clearly planned well in advance of Nixon's Inauguration: the PAVN needed time to prepare such a multi-divisional operation. Two of the "understandings" that had been previously established had been violated by Hanoi. This action was certainly designed to test the new President's reaction to such a crisis. Yet Hanoi had cynically violated the "understandings" without any American provocation. Such an action could only be met by one response: a devastating military campaign. With Hanoi, diplomacy always had to be backed by military strength, as France had learned in 1954.

¹⁴³ David Fulghum and Terence Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983), p.17.

Nixon's decision to retaliate with air strikes in the Cambodian sanctuaries was concluded on February 23.¹⁴⁴ However, the pressures of domestic politics and the fact that the President was on an official European state visit delayed the response by nearly a month. Nevertheless, the strategy which would be used most effectively in 1972 was being developed by 1969: defeat North Vietnamese aggression and allow military reverses to force concessions. At this time, Hanoi had chosen the battlefield over diplomacy. Battlefield results, not diplomacy, would determine the Paris Peace Talks. If Nixon had failed to reply firmly, he would have appeared as a craven to Hanoi.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, (USA), (1964-70), was alerted to prepare the contingency plans regarding Cambodia and General Abrams was ordered to select targets. The planning for Operation Breakfast took place at the White House in great secrecy during a working breakfast meeting that included only the President, the National Security Advisor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Air Force Chief of Staff, General John R. McConnell, (USAF), the Assistant Chief of Staff of the Air Force for Operations, Lieutenant General John W. Vogt, (USAF), the Secretary of Defence, Melvin R. Laird, and the Secretary of State, William P. Rogers.¹⁴⁵ Conspicuous by their absence

¹⁴⁴ Kissinger, White House Years, p.475.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

from this meeting were Vice-President Spiro Agnew, Air Force Vice-Chief of Staff, General John D. Ryan, (USAF), and the Commanding General, Pacific Air Forces, General Joseph Nazzoro, (USAF). The secrecy which characterized, and ultimately destroyed the Nixon White House was clearly demonstrated.

The air strike against Base Area 353 (north of the main positions of the American 1st Infantry Division) was a success. General Abrams was gratified by the results and requested further air strikes against a range of Base Areas. Nixon, however, originally intended Operation Breakfast to be "a one-time only affair." He would be provoked into ordering a series of air strikes, Operation Menu, by a North Korean action. On April 14, North Korean MiGs shot down an unarmed American reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan.¹⁴⁶

Nixon was irate and possibly ready to allow Task Force 77 of the United States Seventh Fleet to retaliate against North Korea. However, the President's advisors talked him out of this step. Instead, Nixon ordered a resumption of the secret bombings of the Cambodian sanctuaries. This action was not aimed at Hanoi or Pyongyang, but rather Moscow. The United States was determined to show the Communist giant that any hostile actions by itself or its allies would be met with American military force.

Operation Menu clearly had an important effect on the

¹⁴⁶ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.117.

Paris Peace Talks. The Nixon Administration had repeatedly requested secret meetings with the North Vietnamese in Paris for almost three months. Hanoi, however, had steadfastly opposed this initiative for reasons that are unclear. Yet, on March 22, Hanoi would accept Ambassador Lodge's proposal for a secret meeting, seventy-two hours after it was proposed.¹⁴⁷ The rapid acquiescence on March 22 to the American proposal can perhaps be explained by the North Vietnamese desire to relieve the pressure on the Cambodian Sanctuaries.

Another important effect of Operation Menu was that it aided Vietnamization. Although the success of aerial interdiction in the Vietnam War remains controversial there can be no doubt that repeated B-52 strikes prevented the PAVN from massing its forces. The threat posed by the B-52 strikes was obviously recognized by the military commander of the Central Office for South Vietnam(COSVN), Lieutenant-General Tran Van Tra. Thus, Operation Menu, would have acted as a powerful deterrent to any large-scale PAVN/VC attacks in and around Saigon.

The North Vietnamese Politburo's actions support this assessment. In July of 1969, Resolution 14 was issued and it called for the cadres to break up the main force units and transform the companies into Sapper units.¹⁴⁸ A change in North Vietnamese tactics was clearly underway as reflected by

¹⁴⁷ Lipsman and Doyle, Fighting for Time, p.78.

¹⁴⁸ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.119.

MACV records: in the second half of 1969, battalion-size attacks dropped from 29 to 5 and smaller conventional attacks dropped from 2,185 to 1,620. In 1970 and 1971, there were only 15 PAVN or VC battalion-size attacks.¹⁴⁹ The North Vietnamese had shifted away from the "big unit" war of 1967 and 1968.

For the North Vietnamese, this strategy was logical. The Americans were withdrawing from Vietnam and it was only a matter of time before the PAVN faced only the ARVN. Instead of massing their forces inside the Cambodian sanctuaries, where Operation Menu would have decimated them, the North Vietnamese bided their time by strengthening their units and improving the lines of communication.

If Operation Menu had failed to prevent the PAVN from massing its forces, Vietnamization itself may have been endangered. The decline in large unit enemy attacks allowed the Americans to deescalate while their forces were not engaged in heavy combat. Therefore, American casualties were kept low and the ARVN was given time to modernize and improve its force structure.

However, the secret bombings of Cambodia may have been directed towards another target: China. To understand this aspect, it is first necessary to review the international balance of power. During this time period, the balance was gradually altering. The changes in the balance resulted from

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

three inter-related developments: an expansionist Soviet defence and foreign policy, the Sino-Soviet schism, and the stabilization of the Chinese domestic situation after April of 1969. All of these changes in the balance of power shattered the belief held in Washington since 1949 that a "Moscow-Beijing Axis" existed, which threatened vital Western interests in Asia. The changes in the international balance of power would lead to one of Nixon's greatest accomplishments: the rapprochement with China.

Since 1962, particularly after the downfall of Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in 1964, the Soviet Union had been engaged in a large scale military build-up. Sometime in either 1968 or 1969, the Strategic Rocket Forces of the Red Army achieved nuclear parity with the United States, an objective of the Soviet General Staff since the late 1940s.¹⁵⁰ The leadership in the Kremlin, along with a new generation of military men, led by the Defence Minister Marshal Andrei Grechko and the Chief of Staff of the Red Army, Marshal Matvey Zakharov, now adopted a much more aggressive foreign policy to complement the new found nuclear security.

Both the willingness and the ability of the Soviet Union to intervene decisively in regions of great strategic importance were demonstrated on August 21, 1968. On this date, the Red Army conducted a multi-divisional invasion of

¹⁵⁰ Beckett, The March of Communism, p.76.

Czechoslovakia to remove the reform-minded General Secretary of the Czech Communist Party, Alexander Dubček.¹⁵¹ The Kremlin justified its brutal action, which shocked both the West and China, by its enunciation of a new security formula, the Brezhnev Doctrine. By this doctrine, the Kremlin declared that it had both the duty and right to intervene in the internal affairs of fellow socialist states where socialism was threatened. As stated by Marshal Nie Rongzhen, China's last surviving Marshal, the senior leadership of both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) interpreted the Brezhnev Doctrine as directed towards China.¹⁵²

Clearly, the Brezhnev Doctrine was an important stage in the Sino-Soviet schism. By 1968, it was obvious to most scholars and China observers that fundamental ideological and national interests separated Beijing and Moscow. If there ever had been a "Moscow-Beijing Axis," it had been shattered by Khrushchev's decisions to refuse to provide nuclear technology to the PLA in 1958 and to recall Soviet economic advisors from China in 1960.¹⁵³ Khrushchev and the senior ideologues in the CPSU were deeply alarmed by the radicalism of Mao as clearly demonstrated by The Great Leap Forward. For his part, Mao believed that Khrushchev and his colleagues had

¹⁵¹ Dawisha, Eastern Europe, Gorbachev, and Reform, p.162.

¹⁵² Salisbury, The New Emperors, p.273.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

betrayed the revolution of Lenin and Stalin.

Sino-Soviet relations would actually worsen after 1964, when Leonid Brezhnev assumed the position of General Secretary of the CPSU. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution deeply alarmed Brezhnev and the Party's senior theorists, Yegor K. Ligachev and Nikolai Tikhonov.¹⁵⁴ However, Sino-Soviet relations would not worsen to the point of open warfare until the winter of 1969. In the first months of 1969, the PLA would detonate its first atomic device. The fact that the Chinese now had a nuclear capability deeply concerned the senior leadership of both the CPSU and the Red Army. A basic tenet of Soviet defence policy since 1945 had been to prevent instability on the country's borders. The tumultuous events in China were obviously considered a direct threat to Soviet national security by the Kremlin

In March of 1969, savage fighting erupted along the Ussuri and Amur rivers between corps-sized units of the Red Army and the PLA.¹⁵⁵ The Soviet General Staff reacted quickly to the perceived Chinese aggression by heavily reinforcing its forces in Siberia and the Far East. By the end of 1969, the Red Army had forty divisions stationed in the region.¹⁵⁶ The severity of the Sino-Soviet conflict was revealed in the summer of 1969 when the Kremlin, through

¹⁵⁴ Beckett, The March of Communism, p.182.

¹⁵⁵ Kissinger, White House Years, p.176.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

diplomatic back-channels broached to Washington the possibility of a Soviet pre-emptive nuclear strike on Chinese nuclear facilities in the deserts of Xianjiang.¹⁵⁷

It was highly symbolic that a month after the first clashes took place on the Amur and Ussuri rivers, the Ninth Party Congress was held in Beijing. The mere fact that the Congress was even held, in the midst of the turmoil of The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a major victory for the Party bureaucrats, most notably Zhou Enlai, and the senior leadership of the PLA against the radical Maoists. By declaring Marshal Lin Biao, Minister of Defence, to be Chairman Mao's "heir apparent," the Congress evinced to the world that the worst excesses of The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution were now history.¹⁵⁸ No less important, the Congress also presented a united front, which was especially crucial considering the fact that China and the Soviet Union were on the brink of war.

By the summer of 1968, Mao had probably recognized the need to restore stability to China in the wake of The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968 had greatly worried Mao. He obviously concluded that China's domestic turmoil had to be brought to an end to allow the country to deal with the nuclear threat from Moscow, both diplomatically and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Alan P.L.Liu, How China Is Governed, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984), p.50.

militarily. This decision by Mao would eventually lead to the rapprochement with the United States.

The clashes along the Ussuri River marked a watershed in Sino-American relations since the Korean War. Mao Zedong at this time must have realized that China needed the United States to act as a counterweight to the Soviet menace. Yet, the United States was only of value if it were strong. To Mao, the air strikes in Cambodia must have represented the actions of a strong nation willing to use its military power.

Nineteen sixty-nine would mark the beginning of the Sino-American détente that would culminate in Nixon's state visit to Beijing in February of 1972. The importance of Sino-American détente must not be underestimated with respect to Nixon's policy in Vietnam. China represented North Vietnam's great Achilles Heel: logistics. Although it is true that only 12.5 percent of Hanoi's war material came by the two railways and eight roads from China, the remaining 87.5 percent came through a single port, Haiphong.¹⁵⁹ Haiphong could easily be shut down by mining its approaches; in such a situation, Hanoi would be completely dependent on Beijing's willingness to keep the land routes open. If Beijing were to close the land routes, Hanoi would be left isolated on the battlefield. The United States would now seek to improve Sino-American relations for this eventuality.

The secret bombings of Cambodia remain one of the most

¹⁵⁹ Kissinger, White House Years, p.507.

controversial episodes of the Nixon Presidency. Domestic politics was the determining factor in this secrecy: Nixon was rather fearful of the anti-war backlash that would result if it was learned that the United States were attacking targets in Cambodia. In fact, Operation Menu would be the first step towards Watergate: in May of 1969, Federal Bureau of Investigation(FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover would make use of phone taps on government officials to discover who was leaking critical information to the press.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a survey of events that influenced the Paris Peace Accords between two of the historical snapshots, the decision of President Johnson to begin deescalation of the war, announced on March 31, 1968, and the military incursions into Cambodia and Laos between April, 1970, and February, 1971. During this period, the Nixon Administration had made considerable concessions to the North Vietnamese, such as implementing unilateral troop withdrawals. However, the Politburo in Hanoi had refused to grant a single concession in return. Thus, despite a reasonable offer by the Nixon Administration to end the war, presented by the President on national television on May 14, 1969, the Politburo in Hanoi categorically rejected any American initiative to conclude the Paris Peace Talks. Therefore, events lend substance to the first hypothesis put forward in the introduction: the Paris Peace Talks would only be concluded after a fundamental shift in the position of the North Vietnamese Politburo.

This chapter has also related the role of the three catalysts in influencing the two principal parties in the Paris Peace Talks. The Nixon Administration was obviously under great domestic pressure to bring the war to an end. Strong anti-war sentiment in the country, particularly in the Congress and in the business community, forced the Nixon Administration to continue the policy of deescalation initiated by its predecessor. Therefore, in this context, the troop withdrawals, which were announced by President Nixon in July of 1969, and the concomitant policy of Vietnamization, were driven by domestic political considerations, not military necessity. Thus, the second hypothesis raised in the first chapter, that strong anti-war sentiment would force the Nixon Administration to conclude the Paris Peace Talks, has also been addressed.

Therefore, Hanoi's hard-line negotiating stance was very logical. As long as the Nixon Administration was driven to implement troop withdrawals because of strong anti-war sentiment, regardless of actions by North Vietnam, Hanoi had no incentive to reciprocate American concessions. However, the logic behind the North Vietnamese negotiating intransigence was very obvious to Richard Nixon, who probably had a better understanding of the dynamics of international relations than any other American president of this century. If North Vietnam was ever going to negotiate in "good faith," which to the Nixon Administration meant dropping unreasonable demands, such as the removal of the President of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van

Thieu, Hanoi would have to be coerced into doing so. Despite the complexities of the American domestic situation, Nixon did possess two "trump cards" to use against North Vietnam: Great Power diplomacy and strategic air power.

As briefly analyzed in this chapter, the international balance of power was in its greatest period of flux since the end of the Korean War. The Sino-Soviet schism presented the Nixon Administration with one of the greatest diplomatic opportunities since 1953. President Nixon and National Security Adviser Kissinger understood this opportunity better than most other politicians in the United States. However, attempts to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough of this magnitude would by their very nature be long term. In the short term, Nixon had to try to buy time for Vietnamization, while at the same time implementing large scale troop withdrawals. In addition, some sort of leverage had to be gained against Hanoi to try to force its leaders to modify a very hard-line negotiating position. Nixon resorted to the use of strategic air power against the PAVN base areas in Cambodia. The exact military results of Operation Menu remain controversial to this day, but the airstrikes clearly were straining the North Vietnamese supply lines in Cambodia, to some extent, and preventing COSVN from massing its regiments for large scale attacks in the Saigon region. Thus, the airstrikes were of some military value.

Therefore in this chapter, the basic strategy used by the Nixon Administration to force Hanoi to accept reasonable terms

in Paris begins to take shape. A combination of military pressure and Great Power diplomacy would be used to isolate North Vietnam and force its leaders to modify their hardline position in the Paris Peace Talks. Thus, there is evidence to support the two hypotheses being tested in the thesis: that a fundamental shift in the negotiating position of Hanoi allowed the Paris Peace Accords to be concluded and that strong anti-war pressure in the United States forced the Nixon Administration to conclude the Paris Peace Accords.

PART IV: HANOI DETERMINES TO ROLL THE DICE

CHAPTER V: THE NORTH RESPONDS TO AMERICAN ESCALATION OF THE
CONFLICT

Upon the anniversary of Richard Nixon's first year in office, the Administration could look back on its Vietnam policy with pride. A strong American negotiating position had been established at the Paris Peace Talks, while Vietnamization was being implemented. Troop withdrawals had already been conducted and American casualties had been lowered. Yet, Vietnam was also most frustrating for the President. The Paris Peace Talks were hopelessly deadlocked. Unilateral American concessions had failed to alleviate the situation. Only the battlefield situation in Cambodia in 1970 and in Laos in 1971 would apparently alter Hanoi's bargaining position, not diplomacy. However, the incursions into Cambodia and to a lesser degree, Laos, would also have critical domestic repercussions for the Nixon Administration.

The critical impasse at the Paris Peace Talks was symbolized by the resignation of the American Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, in November, 1969: Nixon would not name a replacement until June of 1970. Yet, a major initiative would

be announced by Nixon in April of 1970, that could have provided the impetus for a settlement if not for the North Vietnamese refusal to adopt the "two-track negotiating" strategy. This initiative would result from American domestic politics, not as a particular strategy for conducting the Paris Peace Talks.

On December 15, 1969, the President had announced a second troop withdrawal- 50,000 servicemen over a period of four months.¹⁶⁰ The North Vietnamese refused to grant a single concession in return. In secret meetings with Henry Kissinger, on March 16 and April 4, the North Vietnamese "Special Advisor" Le Duc Tho categorically rejected an American offer of mutual withdrawal with all American forces to be removed over a period of sixteen months after the cease-fire was signed.¹⁶¹ The next troop withdrawal of 150,000 servicemen, announced on April 20, which would be conducted over a period of twelve months, was forced on Nixon by domestic political considerations. Hanoi had no reason to bargain in good faith: the Americans had withdrawn 115,000 servicemen, and announced the withdrawal of 150,000 more, without a single North Vietnamese concession! North Vietnam was receiving at the negotiating table what it had been unable to achieve on the battlefield between 1965 and 1968.

Yet, the American position was far from hopeless.

¹⁶⁰ Palmer, The 25 Year War, 102.

¹⁶¹ Karnow, Vietnam, p.672.

Because the April 20 troop withdrawal announcement was scheduled over a period of twelve months, the Pentagon could manage the withdrawal so that highly flexible and versatile units, such as the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), would remain in the country the longest. Therefore, the United States maintained the ability to seize the initiative. Nixon would do exactly this in Cambodia in 1970.

On March 18, the ruler of Cambodia, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, was overthrown in a coup d'état launched by Lon Nol, his Prime Minister and Minister of War.¹⁶² The principal reasons for Sihanouk's downfall, in the opinion of Henry Kissinger, were his disastrous economic policy and his inability to evict North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces from Cambodian soil.¹⁶³ Although Kissinger's assessment of events is obviously biased, nonetheless, his arguments are basically sound. Lon Nol now adopted a harsh anti-Communist stance: the port of Sihanoukville was closed to the North Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese were ordered out of the country. The Politburo in Hanoi now reacted savagely to this threat to its lines of communications in southern South Vietnam: the North Vietnamese 1st and 7th divisions and the Viet Cong 5th and 9th divisions attacked westward out of the Cambodian sanctuaries towards Phnom Penh. By April 14, the eastern provinces of

¹⁶² Kissinger, White House Years, p.976.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Cambodia were firmly under Communist control and a siege of Phnom Penh was only a matter of time. This situation threatened the American position in South Vietnam as noted by Richard Nixon: "...we would have been signing a death warrant but for South Vietnam as well. A communist dominated Cambodia would have placed South Vietnam in an untenable military situation..."¹⁶⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were ordered to prepare contingency plans for a massive American-South Vietnamese attack into the Cambodian sanctuaries to disrupt the enemy lines-of-communications. On April 26, the President approved Operation Toan Thang 43/Rockcrusher.¹⁶⁵ The Communist sanctuaries were concentrated in two areas: the Parrot's Beak and the Fishhook, west and northwest of Saigon respectively. A South Vietnamese task force, under the command of Lieutenant General Do Cao Tri, commanding general of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) III corps, would attack into the Parrot's Beak, while a joint Allied task force, including elements of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, under the command of Brigadier General Robert Shoemaker, would attack the Fishhook. D-day was set for April 30.¹⁶⁶

On April 30, the President addressed the American people.

¹⁶⁴ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.116.

¹⁶⁵ Kissinger, White House Years, p.992.

¹⁶⁶ Fulghum and Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, p.123.

Explaining the desperate strategic situation in Cambodia, Nixon notified the nation of the Cambodian incursion. To placate domestic anti-war sentiment, the President declared that American ground forces would remain in-country for only sixty days and penetrate no further than twenty-one miles.¹⁶⁷ Despite such a show of restraint, anti-war protests soon shook the nation, particularly after the shooting of four students at Kent State University on May 4.

Militarily, the Cambodian incursion was a success. American and South Vietnamese forces captured enough individual weapons to equip 74 North Vietnamese infantry battalions and enough crew served weapons to equip 25 North Vietnamese battalions. More than a year's supply of ammunition was captured.¹⁶⁸ North Vietnamese and Viet Cong(VC) forces under the command of the Central Office for South Vietnam(COSVN) would never fully recover from this blow to their lines of communications. After 1970, the People's Army of Vietnam(PAVN) and VC forces would never again mount large-scale attacks(regimental size or larger) in the critical southwest approaches to Saigon or the Mekong Delta. This basic military fact supports the arguments of President Nixon and Dr.Kissinger that the Cambodian incursion was a great military success. As a direct result, Vietnamization was given critical time to be implemented.

¹⁶⁷ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1018.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.1019.

However, the incursion into Cambodia remains controversial. To many Americans, the operation seemed hastily improvised. The military failed to locate and destroy the much celebrated COSVN. Nonetheless, the incursion did have beneficial results for the United States and South Vietnam, despite the fact that there were critical flaws in its planning, as pointed out by generals Bruce R. Palmer, Jr., and Arthur S. Collins.¹⁶⁹

Nixon and Kissinger now believed that the time had come to appoint a new ambassador to the Paris Peace Talks. It was hoped that Hanoi would be willing to negotiate seriously with the new Ambassador David K. Bruce after the show of American force. However, the Nixon Administration's position domestically, particularly in the Congress, was seriously weakened by the strong anti-war sentiment that engulfed the country as a result of the escalation of the conflict. The Congress, enraged by the decision to escalate the conflict, passed the Cooper-Church Amendment in December of 1970, which prohibited American ground forces from operating outside South Vietnam.¹⁷⁰ The inability of the Nixon Administration to muster enough votes in Congress to defeat the bill was clear evidence that support for the President's policy in Vietnam was at best tenuous. President Nixon made a major unilateral concession in October by offering a "stand still" cease-fire,

¹⁶⁹ Palmer, The 25 Year War, p.171.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.521.

which would allow North Vietnamese forces to remain in South Vietnam.¹⁷¹ As a direct result of the Cambodian incursion, the American negotiating position had been weakened politically, but the North Vietnamese position had been weakened militarily.

For the next six months, the Paris Peace Talks would proceed in a fitful manner. In August, Hanoi would agree to another round of secret talks. Because of the need to alleviate domestic pressure after Cambodia, Kissinger made a major concession to break the impasse: the American withdrawal after the war would be complete, with no residual combat forces remaining in South Vietnam.¹⁷² In response, the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG—a front organization used by the Lao Dong Party in South Vietnam) issued Madame Binh's Eight Points in September. The North Vietnamese proposal was unacceptable. It still required unconditional American withdrawal and the installation of a provisional coalition government in Saigon.¹⁷³ The Paris Peace Talks were no closer to resolution in 1970 than 1968.

Even as the Paris Peace Talks were hopelessly stalemated, a clear sign of North Vietnamese intentions became evident: a major buildup of PAVN forces in the Laotian Panhandle. The North Vietnamese were clearly massing their forces for an

¹⁷¹ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.147.

¹⁷² Fulghum and Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, p.122.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

offensive in Military Regions 1 and 2 of South Vietnam in early 1972. If the North Vietnamese were truly committed to a settlement, why was there this massive buildup? This fact seems to suggest that Hanoi had rejected the Paris Peace Talks in favour of a military solution.

Furthermore, it was in Military Regions 1 and 2 (also called I and II Corps) that the ARVN was weakest. The South Vietnamese were stretched to the breaking point, especially in Military Region 2. There were simply not enough ARVN battalions to engage in combat with PAVN forces and to provide troops for pacification duty - the so-called "battalion deficit."¹⁷⁴ Clearly, the strategic and tactical position of the ARVN would only continue to worsen as the enemy buildup continued into 1971. From the strategic viewpoint of Washington and Saigon, the only option was a pre-emptive South Vietnamese offensive into the Laotian Panhandle in early 1971.

By December of 1970, Nixon, Kissinger, Laird and the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, (USN), (1970-1974) were committed to the concept of a South Vietnamese pre-emptive strike. General Abrams believed that a successful offensive could prevent a major enemy offensive for the "indefinite future". The plan that was worked out was very daring: the ARVN 1st Division would cross into Laos on February 8 and proceed half-way to the critical road junction of Tchepone; a South Vietnamese armoured column

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

would link up at Tchepone with Airborne troops; the South Vietnamese would then withdraw southeastward.¹⁷⁵ American troops, which were forbidden to enter Laos by Congress, would be responsible for support and logistics. On January 18, Nixon ordered General Abrams to prepare the operation with a D-date on February 8.

The operation, Lam Son 719, was a serious failure. Several factors would lead to this result: very poor planning, lack of initiative on the part of the ARVN commanders, and the absence of American advisors. However, the leading factor in Lam Son 719's failure was the South Vietnamese I Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam. Lam was a powerful political ally of President Thieu and only held his command for this reason. Lam's actions and behaviour during Lam Son 719 could only be described as incompetent. After reaching Tchepone, Lam would order his forces to retreat eastward, not southeastward through the PAVN's base areas. Lam, in the first week of the operation, stopped giving orders to his troops for nearly two weeks, giving the PAVN the opportunity to regain the initiative. As a result of Lam's stupor, the 3rd Brigade of the Airborne Division was wiped out, as were two Ranger Battalions, the 21st and 39th.¹⁷⁶

However, Lam Son 719 was not the unmitigated disaster as often portrayed by many scholars, such as Gabriel Kolko and

¹⁷⁵ Keith William Nolan, Into Laos: The Story of Dewey Canyon II, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988), p.76.

¹⁷⁶ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1282.

Gareth Porter. With a few exceptions, the South Vietnamese, especially the Marines, fought with courage and tenacity. The great weakness was the incompetence of the senior officers, who retained their commands due to political loyalty to President Thieu. In addition, most South Vietnamese officers had difficulty calling supporting fire without their American advisors. Improved training would alleviate this problem. Lam Son 719 was thus a partial success: the PAVN would not launch its Nguyen hue Offensive until March 31, 1972, instead of early February, which indicated that the North Vietnamese had difficulty in massing their forces due to the damage inflicted on the vital lines of communications in Laos and Cambodia.

The incursion into Laos would lead to renewed activity at the Paris Peace Talks. Nixon and Kissinger put forward a major new proposal: a date would be decided upon for total American withdrawal; American withdrawal would be unilateral provided that all additional North Vietnamese infiltration was halted (clearly a major U.S. concession); a cease-fire in place would be established; both sides would agree to honour the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords, and the South Vietnamese would decide their political future on their own.¹⁷⁷ This proposal would be the one that would be accepted by Hanoi in October of 1972. Kissinger put forward the proposal to Xuan

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Thuy in a secret meeting on May 11 in Paris.¹⁷⁸ Xuan Thuy, significantly, did not reject the new military proposal outright. Instead, the North Vietnamese requested an additional meeting to be held on June 26 with Special Advisor Le Duc Tho in attendance.

Hanoi was possibly reassessing its strategy. Preparations were well underway for the Nguyen Hue Offensive, but there may have been divisions within the Politburo - Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap was now ill with Parkinson's Disease and the "hawks" were possibly losing ground, leading to a review of the new American proposal. Three meetings were held with Le Duc Tho, on June 26, July 12, and July 26. The talks again stalemated over North Vietnamese demands to remove Thieu. Serious negotiations would not resume until the Nguyen Hue Offensive had been defeated in 1972.

The purpose of this chapter has been to study the military incursions into Cambodia in April of 1970 and Laos in February of 1971. President Nixon's bold decision to authorize the incursions, a clear escalation of the war which was certain to have negative domestic and international political repercussions, was prompted by two inter-related facts: the North Vietnamese continued to be intransigent in Paris and Vietnamization required time to ever have any hope for success. Nixon hoped, not without reason, that dramatic escalations of the war would apply pressure on Hanoi to

¹⁷⁸ B.A. Johnson, "Giap's Giant Mistake," Vietnam, February, 1992, p.65.

bargain in "good faith," if only to relieve the military pressure against the lines of communications. Also, the President could expect that large-scale "spoiling operations," against the vital supply lines and base areas of the PAVN would seriously impede the ability of the North Vietnamese to launch major offensives against the ARVN , which was still in an important transition phase.

Therefore, the incursions into Cambodia and Laos were classical examples of the first catalyst identified in the introduction-military reversal/defeat. However, Lam Son 719 in particular had an influence on the Politburo in Hanoi that the Nixon Administration clearly did not expect. Lam Son 719 was clearly a serious failure for the ARVN and the American policy of Vietnamization in general. Thus, this military operation reinforced the perception in Hanoi that the ARVN was merely a puppet army without any intrinsic fighting capability of its own. The senior leadership of both the Lao Dong Party and the PAVN apparently became convinced by the end of March that the American policy of Vietnamization had failed disastrously. Therefore, the Politburo in Hanoi now decided to stake all its objectives on a single huge offensive. The Paris Peace Talks were now only to be used for propaganda, primarily. Instead, the Democratic Republic was seeking a decisive military solution to the Second Vietnam War in 1972. Thus, an analysis of the political ramifications of Lam Son 719 in Hanoi also addresses the second question raised in the introduction- Why did the Paris Peace Talks drag on for so

long?

The timing of the PAVN'S Nguyen Hue Offensive in 1972 was not accidental. Apart from the fact that the North Vietnamese would require almost a year to complete the logistical preparations for an offensive that would ultimately involve thirteen divisions on three separate fronts, 1972 was an American Presidential election year. Obviously, the North Vietnamese hoped to discredit President Nixon in 1972 in much the same way they had discredited President Johnson in 1968. The North Vietnamese expected domestic political considerations to greatly limit the response that would be taken by Nixon. Previous escalations of the war by President Nixon had resulted in a serious domestic anti-war backlash in the United States against the Administration's policies in Indochina, especially on the campuses and in the Congress. Hanoi could reasonably gamble that Nixon would not reescalate the war, despite an outright invasion of the South, because of concern about the anti-war vote in an election year. Thus, the two strategic escalations of the Second Vietnam War by the Nixon Administration up to 1971 clearly had serious domestic political repercussions for the United States-corresponding to the second catalyst identified in the introduction.

Thus, this chapter, by reference to two of the three catalysts, military reversal/stalemate and the threat of domestic instability, has provided evidence to support the first hypothesis-that a fundamental shift was required in the negotiating position of the DRV, and to a lesser extent, the

second hypothesis that domestic anti-war sentiment would apply great pressure on the Nixon Administration to conclude the Paris Peace Talks. Hanoi, right up to the launching of the Nguyen Hue Offensive in March of 1972, had calculated that the war would be settled militarily, not diplomatically. The Politburo had determined in March of 1971 to present the Nixon Administration with a *fait accompli* in Vietnam. There could be no resolution of the Paris Peace Talks as long as Hanoi refused to modify its hard-line negotiating position in Paris and up to September of 1972, it was unwilling to do this because it believed that it possessed the military advantage. Only after the ARVN, with the support of tactical American airpower, had succeeded in halting the Nguyen Hue Offensive and the Americans had dramatically re-escalated the war, without any strong anti-war backlash in the United States nor any vigorous response from China or the Soviet Union, would the Politburo authorize Le Duc Tho to fundamentally alter the Party's negotiating position in Paris.

PART V: SHOWDOWN BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND HANOI

CHAPTER VI: THE NGUYEN HUE OFFENSIVE

In the early morning hours of March 31, 1972, the tranquillity and solitude of Easter Sunday were shattered by a devastating North Vietnamese artillery barrage in northern Quang Tri province against the fire support bases of the 3rd Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Division. This action was soon followed by a direct People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) invasion across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) involving three infantry divisions (the 304th, 308th, and 316th) and a brigade of tanks. The North Vietnamese had finally launched their long-awaited Easter Offensive, code-named Nguyen Hue by the PAVN General Staff. Hanoi had apparently rejected diplomacy in favour of a military solution to finally end the Paris Peace Talks, an assessment supported by events on May 2, when the Special Advisor to the North Vietnamese negotiating delegation, Le Duc Tho, categorically rejected a peace offer put forward by American National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in a secret meeting. Yet, barely five months later,

Le Duc Tho would put forward a new North Vietnamese negotiating position, the "Nine Points," which was almost identical to the American offer of May 2. This chapter will attempt to rationalize the dramatic North Vietnamese "volte face" between May 2 and October 8, 1972. This vital issue will be addressed by reference to the three catalysts identified in the introduction with special emphasis on the first one, military reversal reversal/stalemate. The Nguyen Hue Offensive will be studied in its entirety, from its origins, to its planning, and its outcome. By reference to the Nguyen Hue Offensive, the first hypothesis raised in the introduction will be addressed: the Paris Peace Talks could only have been concluded once the Politburo in Hanoi altered its hard-line negotiating position. In addition, this chapter will further address the first three questions raised in the initial chapter: What were the factors that led the respective parties to conclude the Paris Peace Accords?; Why did the Paris Peace Talks drag on for so long?, and finally, why did Hanoi accept a peace settlement that was not completely in its interests?

As discussed in a previous chapter, the PAVN had been massing its forces in the Laotian Panhandle and the Central Highlands since late in the autumn of 1970. The North Vietnamese were clearly preparing for a multi-front offensive in the wet season of 1972. This offensive was to be the culmination of the negotiating and military strategy adopted by Hanoi. Thus, one explanation of why the Paris Peace Talks

dragged on for so long is presented by the basic strategy underlying the Nguyen Hue Offensive: Hanoi had been biding its time since November of 1968, rebuilding its military after the heavy casualties sustained in Tet of that year and preparing for the eventual showdown with the ARVN.

For the Politburo in Hanoi, a peace settlement would only come through decisive military victory. Gareth Porter has observed:

The spring offensive of 1972, like the Tet Offensive of 1968, was aimed at breaking a stalemate and moving the conflict to a new stage. The Lao Dong Party leaders were determined to force the United States to accept what it had been resisting for more than three years: the end of its client regime's claim to exclusive sovereignty over South Vietnam. The reduction of the Saigon regime to a status equal to that of its opponents would provide an acceptable basis for ending the war. Along with the complete withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from South Vietnam, it would shift the balance of forces sharply in favour of the revolution.¹⁷⁹

If Porter's observation is indeed correct, the stalemate that lasted from November 1968 to October 1972 was a direct result of Hanoi's negotiating strategy. Hanoi was prepared to gamble everything on a single huge offensive.

Therefore in this context, the Paris Peace Talks were foremost a form of psychological warfare for Hanoi.¹⁸⁰ Since 1969, the Peace Talks had been very fruitful for the hardened revolutionaries in Hanoi: the United States had unilaterally

¹⁷⁹ Gareth Porter, A Peace Denied, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana State Press, 1975), p.102.

¹⁸⁰ Fulghum and Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, p.123.

halted the bombing of the North, withdrawn nearly 450,000 servicemen (by May of 1972) from South Vietnam, and agreed to a cease-fire in place. In return, Hanoi had not been compelled to make a single substantive concession. Yet, the anti-war movement in the United States would place the blame for this deadlock on President Nixon. The dynamics of domestic politics would further reduce the American position in the Peace Talks. Nixon's hopes for reelection would be endangered by his inability to end the war. With the Presidential election due in little more than seven months, Hanoi launched its Nguyen Hue Offensive. The North Vietnamese clearly hoped to discredit President Nixon as they had President Johnson in 1968.

Yet, the Politburo's decision was also forced on it by a sense of urgency. By late 1971, Hanoi was feeling very isolated from the Soviet Union, and especially China because of the summit announcements of the summer. In July of that year, Dr. Kissinger's dramatic visit to Beijing had been announced and both governments agreed to a summit between President Nixon and the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Mao Zedong in February of 1972. Shortly after the secret visit to Beijing by Dr. Kissinger had been made public, the United States and the Soviet Union announced a summit to be held in May of 1972 between the President and the General-Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Leonid Brezhnev. Hanoi now recognized that both of its Socialist allies placed the greatest national importance on

improving relations with the United States. The war in Indochina could easily lose the support of the Soviets and Chinese if these two powers determined that their interests were being imperiled. As noted by Melvin Small: "The North Vietnamese, as well as the Left in the United States, discovered that Nixon's détente and intricate China card diplomacy were more important to Moscow than its beleaguered socialist ally."¹⁸¹ Thus, North Vietnam had to strike while its lines of communication remained open to the Soviet Union and China. In his memoirs, Richard Nixon considers the summits vital to eventually concluding the Paris Peace Accords:

Our diplomacy with Moscow and Peking had turned the tables on Hanoi. It had been an article of faith within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that making a decisive military move against North Vietnam risked the intervention of China and the Soviet Union. That now changed: Hanoi was fearful that its allies might use their leverage to intervene on the side of its enemy.¹⁸²

Richard Nixon had come into office with a rapprochement with China one of his major foreign policy goals. Although a rapprochement with China was vital for economic and geostrategic reasons alone, as discussed in a previous chapter, China was one of the keys to ending the war in Vietnam because of its logistical importance to the North Vietnamese war effort. The dramatic meeting between Mao

¹⁸¹ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.222.

¹⁸² Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.123.

Zedong and Richard Nixon in February of 1972 was a devastating psychological blow for Hanoi.

The road to Beijing had been a long and arduous one. Nonetheless, by 1969, Mao clearly understood that his country needed an improved relationship with the United States because of the Soviet threat. Nixon and Kissinger had successfully used a "secret" channel - the office of the President of Pakistan, Yahya Khan. A gradual process of improving links between the United States and China climaxed with Kissinger's secret trip to China in July of 1971. Both the Americans and Chinese had a common desire to end the war in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was very close to concluding a grain deal and a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty with Washington: these concerns were far more important to the Kremlin than the war in Vietnam. Hanoi's isolation was dramatically demonstrated in May of 1972: after Haiphong was mined, neither Moscow nor Beijing offered North Vietnam any assistance in clearing the mines.

The two men principally involved with the planning of the Easter Offensive were Le Duan, First Secretary of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party, and Senior General Van Tien Dung, Chief of Staff of the PAVN. Apparently, the Politburo was persuaded by Le Duan to order the Nguyen Hue Offensive of 1972 in March, 1971.¹⁸³ The Nguyen Hue Offensive was described as

¹⁸³ Palmer, The 25 Year War, p.120.

a campaign that "might last a year" and "decide the war."¹⁸⁴ Yet, in top secret PAVN documents captured by the Americans, senior officers were warning that "If this attack were not successful, it would be ... years before we could launch another big offensive."¹⁸⁵ The Paris Peace Talks would now be determined by the success or failure of the Nguyen Hue Offensive formulated by Senior General Dung.

The North Vietnamese build-up in the fall of 1971 did not go unnoticed. As noted by Henry Kissinger, the United States was fully expecting a major PAVN offensive in the upcoming Presidential election year.¹⁸⁶ By the second half of 1971, Hanoi's public statements and military preparations had turned ominous. The White House, the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA), and the Pentagon had to analyze the often conflicting field reports to determine where and when the North Vietnamese offensive would be launched.

The American response to the North Vietnamese offensive would be seriously impeded by a crucial disagreement between the military and the CIA. General Creighton W. Abrams, Commander-in-Chief of United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam(June 20,1968-June 20,1972), after studying reconnaissance reports, informed the White House on January 4, 1972 that an offensive was imminent, most likely in the

¹⁸⁴ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1108.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p.1115.

¹⁸⁶ Fulghum and Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, p.152.

Central Highlands at the end of February.¹⁸⁷ In another cable on January 20, Abrams declared that the enemy would attempt "to face us with the most difficult situation of which he was capable."¹⁸⁸ Abrams was allowed to step up air activity in the South, but a resumption of the air war against North Vietnam was prohibited.¹⁸⁹ However, the American response to the Nguyen Hue Offensive would be initially restricted because of fundamentally differing views held by the Director of the CIA, Richard Helms.

In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger emphasized categorically that the United States was strengthening its forces in South Vietnam. Yet, the American build-up was very slow: on the eve of the offensive, there were only three squadrons of F-4 fighter bombers and a single squadron of A-37 attack aircraft in South Vietnam to reinforce the South Vietnamese Air Force (RVNAF), along with two aircraft carriers, USS Hancock and USS Midway, in the South China Sea.¹⁹⁰ These deployments reflect serious apprehension over the exact nature of the upcoming offensive within the councils of the American government.

There was no question that a major North Vietnamese offensive would be launched in the late winter-early spring of

¹⁸⁷ Palmer, The 25 Year War, p.120.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Fulghum and Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, 152.

¹⁹⁰ Chinnery, Air War in Vietnam, p.194.

1972. But, where would the North Vietnamese strike? Would the offensive be launched on multiple fronts and would it involve corps-sized operations? Classified CIA reports would cause serious consternation in Washington and Saigon.

In the winter of 1971-72, CIA headquarters at Langley, Virginia had to analyze voluminous amounts of data. Intelligence had clearly pinpointed the 1st and 7th PAVN divisions and the 5th and 9th Viet Cong(VC) divisions reassembling in the Cambodian Sanctuaries. In addition, troop movements along the Ho Chi Minh Trail were very similar to those that had preceded the offensives of 1965 and 1968.¹⁹¹ The North Vietnamese were clearly massing their forces, but to what ultimate strategic design? The CIA was unable to form a consensus and it failed to provide any warning of a major offensive as noted by a leading CIA analyst, George Allen:

We thought there would be another one (in addition to an attack in the Central Highlands) of some size in [MRI] - out of Laos probably...but [the CIA wasn't] expecting it to involve any significant quantities of heavy artillery and armour.¹⁹²

Shortly before the invasion, the CIA sent the President a classified memorandum stating that the long-awaited countrywide offensive using combined arms would not be launched in 1972, at least on the scale predicted by American military intelligence.

¹⁹¹ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1304.

¹⁹² Fulghum and Maitland, South Vietnam on Trial, p.154.

The Pentagon's assessment of North Vietnamese intentions was the direct opposite of that of the CIA. Both General Abrams and Admiral John S. McCain, Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Command, were convinced that the North Vietnamese were preparing for an all out offensive in Military Regions 1 and 2. The military's entreaties to Washington did not go completely unheeded: when the Nguyen Hue Offensive was launched, the 3rd Strategic Air Division on Guam had been reinforced and Saigon had moved two Marine brigades from the strategic reserve to Military Region 1. The limited nature of American air resources in South East Asia on the eve of the offensive indicate that the dispute between the CIA and military had serious ramifications, however. Yet, the inference made by writers such as Gabriel Kolko¹⁹³ that American military intelligence failed to anticipate the Nguyen Hue Offensive is obviously fallacious.

Therefore, the North Vietnamese offensive caught the Americans not completely militarily-prepared to support South Vietnam in resisting the onslaught. Senior General Dung's decision to launch a World War Two type blitzkrieg across the DMZ took the South Vietnamese Military Region I commander, Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, and General Abrams by surprise. The American and South Vietnamese militaries had expected North Vietnam to respect the DMZ out of fear of outraging American and world opinion by a blatant violation of

¹⁹³ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.423.

international law.¹⁹⁴ The weak ARVN 3rd Division, with two of its regiments, the 56th and 57th, composed entirely of former deserters and criminals, immediately buckled and lost all of its firebases north of Quang Tri. Quang Tri and Hue appeared certain to fall by early April.

By April 2, the Nixon Administration was fully aware of the extent of the enemy offensive.¹⁹⁵ With disaster facing the South Vietnamese, Nixon authorized the resumption of air strikes against targets in North Vietnam -south of the 18th Parallel - Operation Linebacker I. The offensive could have hardly come at a worse time for Nixon who was in the midst of a reelection campaign. Nixon would risk his political career to defeat the North Vietnamese offensive.

The White House was also engaged on the diplomatic front with Hanoi. A secret meeting was scheduled for May 2 between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho.¹⁹⁶ Nixon hoped that his forceful military response and active diplomacy with Beijing and Moscow would convince Hanoi that there had to be a negotiated settlement to end the war. Kissinger made the final American peace proposal of the war: a cease-fire in place, unilateral withdrawal of American ground units, and the release of Prisoners-of-War(POWs). However, Washington refused to budge on a central issue: President Thieu would not be forced from

¹⁹⁴ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1313.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.1308.

office and replaced by a communist dominated coalition government. At the secret meeting, Le Duc Tho acted in a very dogmatic manner as if the war was already won. The American proposal was rejected outright. North Vietnam's refusal to bargain was a direct result of military success - on April 5, the North Vietnamese launched an offensive in Military Region 3, near An Loc threatening Saigon, while on April 12, a third offensive threatened Kontum in the Central Highlands.¹⁹⁷ Nixon had to counter this North Vietnamese aggression.

After the failure of the secret meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, Nixon had to resort to some dramatic military action. The action favoured by the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the mining of Haiphong. This step would succeed in severing Hanoi's lines of communication and isolating it. Yet, if Nixon took this drastic step, Moscow might respond by cancelling the planned summit for May. Nixon's political career was now at stake. On May 6, President Nixon authorized the Pentagon to execute the mining of Haiphong Harbour on May 8. Nixon had clearly decided upon a strategic escalation to come to the aid of beleaguered South Vietnam. If the General-Secretary of the CPSU, Leonid Brezhnev, had cancelled the May summit, Nixon's bid for reelection in November would have been imperiled, giving impetus to the anti-war movement in the United States. On May 8, President Nixon addressed the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

American people in a live television broadcast. He explained why he had decided upon such a dramatic escalation of the war. The secret meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho on May 2 was revealed and Nixon declared that the peace proposal that had been put forward remained on the table. Nonetheless, the future of the Paris Peace Talks would now be determined by battlefield results: Hanoi had embarked on a huge military gamble to try to obtain what it could not at the negotiating table.

Le Duc Tho had rejected the American proposal of May 2, 1972 at a time when North Vietnamese fortunes on the battlefield had reached their zenith. Quang Tri City had fallen on April 29 and the ARVN's defensive line along the My Chanh River was at best tenuous.¹⁹⁸ The ancient imperial capital of Hue appeared doomed and the new PAVN's offensives in Military Regions 2 and 3 were initially very successful. Hanoi now consolidated its forces for the final onslaught. By the middle of June, however, American intelligence was pointing to a new development: the PAVN offensive had stalled. North Vietnam's great gamble had failed and 13 under-strength, war-weary divisions were now tied down in the South.

In retrospect, the Nguyen Hue Offensive had one critical flaw that undermined its potential for success: the three separate offensives were not coordinated. Therefore, Military Assistance Command Vietnam(MACV-under the command of General

¹⁹⁸ Dale Andrade, " Quang Tri Disaster," Vietnam, edited by Colonel H.G.Summers, (USA-Retired), April, 1994, p.35.

Frederick C. Weyand, (USA), after June 20) could concentrate its air assets and the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff its reserves (composed of only two brigades of the Airborne Division and a single Marine brigade) against individual offensives that were isolated on the battlefield.

If the PAVN been able to coordinate the different offensives, the ARVN would have been hard pressed to reinforce three fronts simultaneously. In addition, American air power was seriously understrength in the first few weeks of the Nguyen Hue Offensive and was quite possibly inadequate to halt the offensive alone in the absence of strong ARVN reserves. The prior incursions into Cambodia and Laos by the South Vietnamese and the Americans were now resulting in strategic gains: the PAVN found it difficult to mass its forces and almost impossible to coordinate the separate offensives because of the damaged lines of communication. The offensive in Military Region 2, which threatened to cut South Vietnam in half at the end of April, had been effectively neutralized by the end of the next month. After two regiments of the 22nd ARVN Division had collapsed north of Kontum, President Thieu acted decisively. The inept commander of Military Region 2, Major-General Ngo Dzu, was relieved of his command and replaced with a "fighting general," Lieutenant-General Nguyen Van Toan.¹⁹⁹ Toan, with critical reinforcements from the Joint General Staff's Strategic Reserve in the form of the

¹⁹⁹ Maitland and Weiss, South Vietnam on Trial, p.123

3rd Airborne Brigade and the 369th Marine Brigade, was able to blunt the PAVN offensive in the Central Highlands.²⁰⁰ Meanwhile, in Military Region 3, the North Vietnamese were only able to concentrate two divisions, the 5th and 9th VC for the crucial attack on An Loc.²⁰¹ In addition, because of the lack of enemy activity in the Mekong Delta, the entire 21st ARVN Division was moved outside An Loc to break the siege.

North Vietnam's supply situation had by now become critical. The mining of Haiphong was accelerated by the dilapidated condition of the Chinese railways.²⁰² At the summit in Beijing, the war in Indochina had been an important topic, and one of the reasons for Nixon's desire for improved relations with the Asian giant. Regardless of ideological commitments, the leaders of China, especially the Chairman of the State Council, Zhou Enlai, and the senior officers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Marshals Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, realized that a major war of Vietnamese expansionism was not in their country's interest.²⁰³ The Vietnamese and Chinese have been historical enemies for more than two millennia. A strong, united Vietnam dominating Laos and Cambodia, possibly allied to the Soviet Union, was a threat to China. In addition, if China wanted

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1312.

²⁰² Ibid, p.1316.

²⁰³ Alan P.L.Liu, How China Is Ruled , p.202

the United States to act as an effective counterweight to the Soviet Union, the United States had to extricate itself from Vietnam. China's attitude towards the war in Vietnam was expressed by Zhou Enlai to Henry Kissinger while Kissinger was in Beijing from June 19 until June 23, 1972:

Chou asked pointed questions about Nixon's May 8 proposal (which was in effect a cease fire offer), repeated the standard line of China's historical debt to Hanoi, avoided any implication of any Chinese national interest in the war, and implied that most of China's supplies to Vietnam were foodstuffs.²⁰⁴

The realists of the Chinese Politburo had concluded that improved relations with the United States had to take priority over Hanoi's concerns.

By mid-June of 1972, the South Vietnamese were prepared to launch a general counter-offensive, concentrated in Quang Tri Province. The PAVN offensives against An Loc and Kontum had been effectively countered by American air power and the steadfast resistance of the ARVN.²⁰⁵ President Thieu would now shuffle his forces in preparation for the offensive to retake Quang Tri: Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong replaced the inept Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam and the whole of the strategic reserve was transferred to his command.²⁰⁶ By September 9, South Vietnamese Marines had recaptured the

²⁰⁴ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1343.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

historic Citadel in Quang Tri. Quang Tri had been the first provincial capital to fall to the Communists during the Second Vietnam War and the North Vietnamese leadership clearly considered its retention vital for symbolic purposes. The ability of South Vietnamese Marines and airborne troops to recapture Quang Tri despite the fact the PAVN had committed seven of its best divisions to secure it clearly demonstrated that the Nguyen Hue Offensive was spent. This fact could not have been lost to the leadership in Hanoi.

Against this background of military reversal for Hanoi, the Paris Peace Talks would once again commence in an attempt to end the war. This scenario was exactly the one Henry Kissinger had anticipated:

I had reckoned all along that Hanoi's offensive would culminate in a serious negotiation, whatever happened. If Hanoi were to prevail on the battlefield, Nixon would be forced to settle on Hanoi's terms; if the offensive...were blunted and Nixon looked like the probable winner [in the November, 1972 Presidential election], Hanoi would make a major effort to settle with us.²⁰⁷

On June 29, Nixon announced that the plenaries would restart on July 16. A secret meeting was arranged between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger at 11 rue Dartle, Paris, July 19.

Kissinger entered the meeting of July 19 very confident. The North Vietnamese were suffering very serious reverses in South Vietnam and, quite possibly, they were deeply concerned

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p.1336.

that Nixon would prove to be more hawkish if they could not settle with him before the Presidential election. An American policy of making no new concessions until Hanoi's intentions were clear was adopted. The National Security Advisor hoped to embrace the "dual track" negotiating strategy: "...settling the military issues, and leaving the political issues essentially to future negotiations among the parties. Such a settlement would preserve our allies and give them an opportunity to determine their future."²⁰⁸

The secret meeting of 19 July failed to provide any breakthrough, but Kissinger noticed a new attitude on the part of the North Vietnamese. They were "benign and friendly now"²⁰⁹ as compared to their arrogance in May. In addition, Le Duc Tho, not Xuan Thuy, did most of the speaking for the North Vietnamese delegation, indicating that the North Vietnamese attached a new importance to the talks. Both sides agreed to hold another meeting on August 1.

At this meeting, Hanoi's delegation began to offer substantial concessions, the first time in the history of the Paris Peace Talks that it did so. The most important concession made by Le Duc Tho concerned the deadline for the withdrawal of American forces: it was no longer unconditional, but linked to a cease-fire.²¹⁰ Important concessions were

²⁰⁸ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1369.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.1371.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

also made concerning the provisional coalition government. For the first time in nearly four years, the Paris Peace Talks were making progress. Further minor progress would be made at the secret meetings of August 14, September 15, and September 27, but Hanoi would not fundamentally change its position until October 8.

As the meeting of October 8 opened, Kissinger noticed two large green folders in front of Le Duc Tho. The National Security Advisor sensed that they contained something dramatic. At 4:00 P.M., Kissinger's instinct proved correct. Le Duc Tho declared:

I think we cannot negotiate in the way we are doing now...In order to show our good will and to ensure a rapid end to the war, rapid restoration of peace in Vietnam, as all of us wish for, today we put forward a new proposal...²¹¹

The Paris Peace Talks had just entered a decisive stage.

Le Duc Tho proposed that the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam(DRV) sign an agreement settling the military questions between them - withdrawal, prisoners, and a cease-fire.²¹² Relating to the political settlement, "we shall only agree on the main principles. After the signing of this agreement a cease fire will immediately take place."²¹³ The entire concept of a coalition government was dropped; instead an "Administration for National Concord" was

²¹¹ Ibid, p.1395.

²¹² Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.150.

²¹³ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1385.

to be established, being responsible for implementing the signed agreements, achieving national concord and "organizing" unspecified general and local elections.²¹⁴ Hanoi also agreed to permit American military aid for South Vietnam to continue and to stop all infiltration into the South. If the United States could enforce the last provision of the accord, South Vietnam's chances of survival would greatly increase. The United States now had the opportunity to establish a "protective umbrella" over South Vietnam with which Saigon would have the opportunity to address the fundamental social and political problems of the regime. This new proposal offered an excellent opportunity for ending the war, and to a much lesser extent, preserving the independence of South Vietnam.

Kissinger accepted this new North Vietnamese proposal in principle. There were still some serious gaps, such as the failure to provide cease-fires in Laos and Cambodia, but further negotiation could whittle away these points of contention. The war in Vietnam was not yet ended, but this substantial North Vietnamese proposal was the long-awaited "light at the end of the tunnel."

This chapter has studied the impact of the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive on the Paris Peace Talks. The fact that the Paris Peace Talks had been stalemated for almost forty-one months when the Nguyen Hue Offensive was launched,

²¹⁴ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.154.

along with the PAVN build-up in the Laotian Panhandle and eastern Cambodia since the late fall of 1970 would seem to suggest that Hanoi never intended to settle the war by diplomatic means. Instead, a strong case can be put forward that the senior leadership of the Lao Dong Party and the PAVN had always planned to end the war by a military solution. Thus, this chapter has addressed three of the four questions raised in the introduction: What were the factors that led the respective parties to conclude the Paris Peace Accords in 1973?; Why did the Paris Peace Talks drag on for so long?; Why did Hanoi accept a peace settlement that was not completely in its interests?

The first and third catalysts that were identified in the introduction were also clearly influencing the belligerents during this time period. If a belief that final military victory was possible acted as the primary determinant in Hanoi's hard-line negotiating position, it was only logical that military reversal/stalemate could fundamentally alter it.

The impact of the failure of the Nguyen Hue Offensive on the North Vietnamese negotiating position in Paris was clearly critical. In his work, The Structure of International Conflict, Mitchell argues that a number of conditions must be met before conflict termination can begin:

- 1) The leaders of the party confronting failure must be agreed that they have, in fact, failed.
- 2) The loser's leaders must take a decision to make the best of some compromise settlement rather than "fighting on," in the hope that some near-miracle will save them.

3) The definition of the current situation of success and failure held by both parties' leaders must be similar, in that one side has recognized the symbols of defeat (the loss of a capital, the defeat of the army in the field, the defection of a key ally), while the other recognizes that these are, in fact, symbols of defeat for its adversary.²¹⁵

A strong argument can be made that by October of 1972, all of the above conditions had been essentially met for the first time in the situation facing the Politburo.

The magnitude of North Vietnam's military reversal was complicated by the international balance of power. As has been seen, Nixon's brilliant "triangular" diplomacy was a driving force behind the decision of the North Vietnamese Politburo to authorize the Nguyen Hue Offensive. However, if the offensive, which was the largest and most complicated ever attempted by the PAVN, was defeated or at least brought to a standstill by the ARVN, then the influence of this third catalyst would be greatly exacerbated on Hanoi. By the spring of 1972, the North Vietnamese were feeling seriously isolated from both China and the Soviet Union. The psychological effects of pictures of President Nixon warmly shaking hands with the Chairman of the State Council of the CCP, Zhou Enlai, in Beijing in February and three months later, toasting the General Secretary of the CPSU, Leonid Brezhnev, should not be underestimated. In addition, both the Chinese and the Soviets had already taken one concrete measure which threatened to influence the balance of forces in South Vietnam: the decision

²¹⁵ Ibid, p.181.

not to send minesweepers to clear the approaches to Haiphong Harbour after it had been mined on May 8. The senior leadership of both the Lao Dong Party and the PAVN had good reason to fear future actions of China and the Soviet Union. The North Vietnamese Politburo realized only too clearly that the foreign policies of both China and the Soviet Union contained a fundamental contradiction: ideological commitments were often not compatible with national interests. This dilemma was further complicated for the North Vietnamese by the fact that President Nixon unlike his predecessor, President Johnson recognized the fundamental dichotomy that existed in the foreign policies of China and the Soviet Union and was determined to utilize it to help bring the war in Vietnam to an end.

CHAPTER VII: DO THEY KNOW THAT IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME?

After the momentous secret meeting between American National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and the "Special Advisor" to the North Vietnamese negotiating delegation, Le Duc Tho, on October 8, 1972, both Washington and Hanoi had good reason to believe that the Paris Peace Accords were about to be concluded. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that President Richard Nixon sincerely believed that a peace settlement would be reached before the election in November. The optimism of the Nixon Administration was clearly revealed in a press conference given by the National Security Advisor on October 26, 1972. The hopes of a war-weary nation were greatly buoyed by Dr. Kissinger's famous announcement that "peace is at hand." Indeed, the secret meeting of October 8 had brought forward the dramatic change in Hanoi's bargaining position that would allow the Paris Peace Accords to be signed on January 27, 1973. Yet, the path to peace would be a most arduous one: on December 18, Nixon would order the execution of Operation Linebacker II, the so called "Christmas Bombings." To this day, the "breakdown" of the Paris Peace Talks in early December of 1972 and the subsequent "Christmas

Bombings" remain one of the most controversial episodes of the Second Vietnam War, and indeed, the entire Nixon Presidency. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the two hypotheses raised in the introduction: that only a fundamental shift in the negotiating strategy of Hanoi allowed the Paris Peace Talks to be successfully concluded, and that the Nixon Administration was compelled to settle the Peace Talks because of strong anti-war sentiment in the United States, especially in the Congress. The first three questions raised in chapter one will be further analyzed, as will the fourth one: Why did the United States accept a peace settlement that was not completely in Saigon's interests?

To understand the factors behind the "breakdown," one must first understand the importance of the schedule agreed upon by the two sides in October. The North Vietnamese obviously wanted the Paris Peace Accords concluded before the Presidential election on November 7, 1972. Hanoi's leaders were quite possibly concerned about the opinion polls regarding the upcoming American Presidential election. Nixon was going to be reelected in a huge landslide and it was only natural to expect major Republican gains in Congress as well. Hanoi was probably concerned that the President might step up the military pressure after the Presidential election if the Paris Peace Accords were not concluded. Yet, Hanoi's strategy was based on a critical assumption: that hawkish Republicans would make major gains in the Congressional elections.

Kissinger agreed to follow the schedule because he believed that the remaining areas of contention in the Paris Peace Talks, such as the status of the 10,000 Viet Cong being held in South Vietnamese prisons, American Prisoners-of-War(POWs) and Missings-in-Action(MIAs), and cease-fires in Laos and Cambodia, could be successfully resolved before the end of October and that the approval of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu would be forthcoming. Indeed, all of the areas of contention in the Paris Peace Talks would be successfully concluded, with the ominous exception of a cease-fire in Cambodia. Nonetheless, Kissinger believed that President Thieu's approval of the October 8 proposal would be readily forthcoming. Thus, in retrospect, Kissinger had every reason to be optimistic as he left Paris for Washington on October 12.

Yet, Kissinger's optimism was based on one critical assumption: that Thieu would be willing to accept the proposal. Thieu had been informed of every major American initiative to end the war since Richard Nixon had entered the Oval Office. Thieu had claimed to have fully supported Nixon's Vietnamization policy and the concomitant troop withdrawals at the Midway Conference in 1969. When the United States had dropped its demand for mutual withdrawal of forces in October of 1971, Thieu agreed with this momentous concession. Thieu had been fully aware and apparently supportive of the American position going into the critical

meeting of October 8. Thus, it was not illogical to expect Thieu's acceptance of the new North Vietnamese proposal.

Yet, a fundamental and vital change had now taken place: the war was about to end and the remaining American forces were about to withdraw. Thieu had probably agreed to all the other American proposals because he expected Hanoi to reject them. If the Paris Peace Accords were concluded, Thieu would stand alone against the threat from North Vietnam.

President Thieu was a patriot and ultimately his actions were dictated by this fact. He had led his country through seven tumultuous years of bitter warfare. Now it must have appeared to Saigon that the United States expected South Vietnam to stand alone against the DRV. The Politburo in Hanoi could not be expected to abandon its quest to reunify Vietnam, and ultimately, to establish its hegemony over all of Indochina. The South Vietnamese were apparently left to their own fate, despite the fact that President Nixon had promised to enforce the Accords, a commitment that was plausible when the President's actions after March 31 are taken into consideration. Nonetheless, Thieu must have felt betrayed: in similar circumstances, the United States maintained the 8th Army in the Republic of Korea as a deterrent against renewed North Korean-Chinese aggression.²¹⁶ Psychologically, South Vietnam did not feel prepared to stand alone against North Vietnam. For eight years the United

²¹⁶ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1417.

States had been responsible for most of the heavy fighting and now South Vietnam was expected to carry the burden.

Against this psychological background, Thieu met with Kissinger and Major General Al Haig, Special Military Assistant to the National Security Advisor, on October 19.²¹⁷ At this first meeting, Thieu adopted the tactic of stalling - a series of intelligent questions was asked, but none relevant to the Accords. Both parties agreed to meet the next day. The Americans now received some good news: the North Vietnamese wanted to keep the original schedule and offered two major concessions, involving Viet Cong prisoners in South Vietnamese jails and military hardware replacement.²¹⁸ The North Vietnamese had agreed to settle the fate of the Viet Cong prisoners through one of the mechanisms established to enforce the Accords, the Joint Military Commission(JMC), while strict limitations would be placed on the replacement of military hardware.

The meeting of October 20 was melodramatic and both sides proposed to meet on October 22, a day that would be as decisive as October 8. At the previous meeting, Thieu had recommended 23 changes to the original text.²¹⁹ Although some of the changes were significant, Kissinger remained

²¹⁷ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.150.

²¹⁸ Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace, p.37.

²¹⁹ Karnow, Vietnam, p.652.

confident as he prepared to meet with Thieu and the South Vietnamese National Security Council that afternoon. The American National Security Advisor received a very rude shock: Thieu rejected the proposal and stipulated that he would never put his signature on such a document.²²⁰ Kissinger now faced the prospects of four years of diplomacy and thousands of American lives being expended in vain.

Yet, from a South Vietnamese perspective, Thieu's objections were well-founded. The Accords would allow North Vietnam to maintain a force of 13 divisions and 26 independent regiments on South Vietnamese territory after the last American ground forces departed.²²¹ In addition, Thieu was expected to resign a month before new Presidential elections in the South, a proposal that he had accepted nearly a year earlier.²²² The South Vietnamese President, in all likelihood, had only agreed to this proposal because he never expected the Accords to be concluded. The only guarantee that he was specifically given concerning South Vietnamese national security against renewed encroachments by the DRV was a verbal commitment by President Nixon. The South Vietnamese President may very well have concluded that the war-weariness in the United States, particularly in the Congress, would prevent any forceful response from Nixon in the event of North Vietnamese

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Kissinger, White House Years, p.1465.

²²² Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace, p.42.

aggression. Clearly, Thieu had every reason to be less than pleased with the draft agreement. Yet the manner in which he feigned support for every American proposal since 1969 and, at the last second, revealed his real opinions, was truly treacherous. Richard Nixon, who had risked his political career over the war in Vietnam, deserved much better from an ally.

The United States had forced Hanoi to end its intransigence in Paris by decisively routing the Nguyen Hue Offensive but now faced the prospect of the Paris Peace Talks collapsing because of a diplomatic conflict with its ally in Saigon. On October 26, Hanoi, after being informed that the United States could not honour the previously agreed upon schedule, publicly released the draft peace agreement.²²³ The President authorized Kissinger to go ahead with a press briefing in which the National Security Advisor stated:

We believe that peace is at hand. We believe that an agreement is within sight, based on the May 8 proposals of the President and some adaptations of our January 25 proposals, which is just to all parties.²²⁴

Kissinger's statement "peace is at hand" would haunt him for the rest of his life. His critics would contend that this action was a blatant electoral ploy. Yet, a case can be made that although the upcoming Presidential election influenced

²²³ Ibid, p.38.

²²⁴ Ibid.

Kissinger's positive assessment, it did not do so decisively: polls were clearly predicting a landslide for Nixon even if a peace agreement were not signed. Nixon deserves credit for not allowing the upcoming Presidential election to seriously alter his stance towards Saigon.

November 7, 1972, surely must have been the zenith of Nixon's political career. The President received 61.3 percent of the popular vote and he swept every state in the Union except Massachusetts.²²⁵ Traditional strongholds of Democratic support, such as the Jewish vote, were undermined by Nixon. Yet, this victory was not complete. The Republicans actually lost two seats in the Senate, leaving the Democrats with 57 seats, while only seven seats were gained in the House, short of a majority by eight.²²⁶

The shrewd Politburo members in Hanoi must now have seen an excellent opportunity to promote North Vietnam's interests. The elections in early November had resulted in a strongly anti-war Congress. Nixon now faced the prospect of Congress terminating all military support to South Vietnam. Thus, the Administration considered it vital to conclude the Accords before January 30, 1973. Hanoi believed it was in its interests to procrastinate.

²²⁵ Max Frankell, "Nixon Elected in Landslide: Margin About 60%," The New York Times, Volume 122, No.41,927, November 8, 1972, p.A1.

²²⁶ R.W. Apple, Jr. "Democrats Retain Congress: Many Votes Split," The New York Times, Volume 122, No.41,927, November 8, 1972, p.A1

Against this background, Kissinger once again met with Le Duc Tho on November 20.²²⁷ The South Vietnamese proposed changes were put forward and the next day Hanoi categorically rejected them. By now, the United States realized that any settlement would require the abandonment of the South Vietnamese proposals. On November 25, the Talks were recessed.

When the Talks were reconvened on December 4, the North Vietnamese had changed their position. Some positions previously agreed upon by Hanoi were withdrawn and new, unacceptable demands were put forward, such as the Demilitarized Zone(DMZ) not being a legal boundary. To state that the Talks had "broken down" would be incorrect. Both sides still accepted the basic proposal of October 8, but Hanoi was now demanding a few fundamental changes to the text. With Hanoi refusing to modify a few of its key new demands, Nixon ordered the Talks recessed on December 13. The much celebrated "breakdown" had occurred and prospects for the future were bleak.

The motives behind Hanoi's actions have been greatly debated. Yet, in all probability, North Vietnam was not attempting to scuttle the Accords, but rather trying to force Nixon to make at least one major concession, regarding the DMZ, before the Congress reconvened on January 3, 1973. Militarily, Hanoi's position had not improved since October,

²²⁷ Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace, p.31

1972: there was no longer a strategic reserve in North Vietnam and all the units in South Vietnam were seriously understrength.²²⁸ In addition, the Soviet Union and China were applying heavy diplomatic pressure on North Vietnam to conclude the Accords. North Vietnamese intransigence was thus fulfilling two major goals: pressuring Nixon to make a few major concessions and allowing various ancillary units, such as anti-aircraft battalions and construction regiments, to be rushed to the battlefield in South Vietnam before the cease-fire was achieved.²²⁹

Nixon, however, was not prepared to make any further concessions. The Accords had to be signed as they currently existed. If any further concessions were made, conservatives could charge the President with betraying South Vietnam. Four years earlier, Nixon had promised the American people that he would obtain a "peace with honour" and that promise would be fulfilled before his second term began. In retrospect, it can perhaps be argued that this matter was quite possibly some sort of obsession for President Nixon.

On December 14, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, (USN), (1970-1974), was ordered to prepare contingency plans for massive air attacks to be carried out by the Strategic Air Command in and around

²²⁸ Ibid, p.42.

²²⁹ Tom Carhart, Battlefront Vietnam, (New York: Warner, 1984), p.137.

Hanoi and Haiphong.²³⁰ This time, the restrictions on the military were lifted. Moorer was told by the President: "I don't want any more of this crap about the fact that we couldn't hit this target or that one. This is your chance to use military power to win this war, and if you don't, I'll hold you responsible!"²³¹ Hanoi would be forced to return to the negotiating table and to sign the Accords at least partially due to the devastating strategic air campaign conducted by the United States.

Beginning on December 18, B-52s from the 3rd Strategic Air Division on Guam and other aircraft from the Air Force and Navy, would fly nearly three thousand sorties for the next eleven days, except December 25. Some 40,000 tons of bombs would be dropped on the most populated areas in North Vietnam with total North Vietnamese civilian casualties amounting to between 1300 and 1600, according to North Vietnamese sources.²³² These controversial bombings have been called genocidal. Such a claim is false. If the United States had wanted to cause wanton civilian deaths, why were the dikes on the Red River not targeted? Even if the North Vietnamese had intentionally lowered their estimation of the casualties, why were total casualties only a tiny fraction of those in Dresden or Tokyo in 1945?

²³⁰ Ibid, P.151.

²³¹ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.125.

²³² Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace, p.107.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that civilian casualties in Hanoi-Haiphong were probably kept as low as possible, a devastating anti-war backlash resulted both domestically and internationally against the Nixon Administration's dramatic escalation of the war. Massive anti-war demonstrations took place not only throughout the United States, but also abroad. Perhaps most alarming for Nixon, there was revulsion in Congress over the "Christmas Bombings." As the New Year approached, such powerful senators as Mike Mansfield, the Majority leader in the Senate, William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and John C. Stennis, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called for strong action by the Congress to limit the President's scope of action as Commander-in-Chief.²³³ As made clear from his memoirs, President Nixon took the threats from Congress very seriously. Both the President and ranking members of the Administration believed that the Paris Peace Accords had to be settled by the end of January, 1973, before the Congress could act. In retrospect, as argued by Gareth Porter, Richard Nixon had clearly miscalculated the degree of anti-war sentiment that would be generated by the "Christmas Bombings."²³⁴

However, the "Christmas Bombings" had their desired effect at least to some point: when Kissinger once again met

²³³ Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.223.

²³⁴ Porter, A Peace Denied, p.275.

with Le Duc Tho on January 8, the North Vietnamese were no longer intransigent. All proposed changes to the Accords previously made by Hanoi had been deleted.²³⁵ Although it is true that Kissinger was unable to obtain any further concessions, Le Duc Tho made one verbal commitment promising token troop withdrawals. Significantly, shortly after the Accords were signed, the PAVN 308th and 312th divisions withdrew across the DMZ.²³⁶ Quite possibly, Hanoi would have honoured the Accords, agreed upon by Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, on January 13, 1973, if Washington could have enforced them.

After January 13, 1973, the only serious obstacle left was Thieu's unwillingness to sign the Accords. Nixon now threatened to sign the Accords with or without South Vietnam. Thieu, realizing that South Vietnam would be in a difficult position, agreed to sign.

The purpose of this chapter has been to analyze the impact of the three catalysts on the two principal actors in the Paris Peace Talks, the United States and the DRV. By analyzing the importance of the three catalysts for the two principal belligerents, the two hypotheses raised in the introduction, that only a fundamental change in the negotiating strategy of Hanoi allowed the Paris Peace Talks to be concluded and that strong anti-war sentiment in the United

²³⁵ Ibid, p.112.

²³⁶ Ibid, p.106.

States compelled the Nixon Administration to accept the Paris Peace Accords, have been addressed. The fact that Hanoi rejected the American proposals of May 2, 1972, but then accepted the same ones on October 8, 1972, clearly indicates a fundamental shift in the position of the Politburo. To rationalize the dramatic policy change by the senior leadership in Hanoi, it is necessary to study the changing circumstances of the war in South-East Asia, both militarily and politically. By the end of September, even the most ardent supporters of a military solution in the Politburo of the Lao Dong Party, First Secretary of the Party Le Duan, Chairman of the Party's Organization Department Le Duc Tho, and the Minister of Defence Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap had to recognize that the Nguyen Hue Offensive had failed. The "doves" within the Politburo, senior Party theorist Truong Chinh and the Chairman of the Central Office for South Vietnam(COSVN) Pham Hung, were able, judging by the extant evidence available, to prevail upon their "neutral" cohorts, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Pham Van Dong and the Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, to support a negotiated settlement to the conflict.²³⁷ Support for a conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks was based on a recognition of military

²³⁷ This speculation on the internal dynamics of the North Vietnamese Politburo is largely based on an article by William E.Colby, "Operation Phoenix" in Vietnam magazine in January of 1994. Mr. Colby was the CIA Station Director in Saigon from 1967 to 1969. From 1973 to 1976, Colby was the Deputy Director of the CIA under Stansfield Turner.

reversal, as well as deep concern over domestic problems in the DRV.

According to the World Bank, in 1966 North Vietnam was one of the twenty-five poorest countries in the Third World.²³⁸ Along with the re-unification of Vietnam, economic development was one of the two most important objectives of the regime. Between 1954 and 1963, the policy of "socialist construction" would produce some beneficial results. Illiteracy was largely wiped out and basic health care had been extended to most sectors of the population. Yet, serious problems remained to be overcome.

By the early 1960s, agriculture was in a very deep crisis. The forced collectivization of farmland, after 1955, had led to serious disturbances in the countryside. Sources as diverse as Richard Nixon and Dr. Douglas Pike estimate that at least fifty thousand landlords and wealthy peasants were put to death during this period. Once the collectivization of agriculture had taken place, the giant state farms were found to be extremely inefficient and cumbersome. As a direct result, agricultural production declined considerably.

The implementation of a Soviet-style command economy led to serious problems in the industrial sector as well. Between 1954 and 1965, the DRV received massive amounts of foreign assistance. China contributed approximately \$670 million

²³⁸ Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, Inside the VC and the NVA, p.261.

during this period, while the Soviet Union contributed roughly twice this amount.²³⁹ Most of this foreign assistance went towards developing a nascent industrial sector. With some exceptions, such as the Thai Nguyen Steel and Rail Works, the industrial sector was very inefficient and characterized by bureaucratic corruption. As an industrial power, North Vietnam ranked behind states such as Uruguay and Lebanon.

If North Vietnam's economy was in a severe crisis in 1965, it was on the verge of collapse in 1972, however. With the complete bombing halt announced by President Johnson in October of 1968, the North Vietnamese had made great progress in rebuilding the devastated economy of the DRV. Such accomplishments were all the more impressive because of the devastating effects of Operation Rolling Thunder between 1965 and 1968. However, the country's infrastructure had been utterly shattered by the resumption of the American bombing campaign--Operation Linebacker I--in April of 1972. Continuation of the war could very well lead to an outright collapse of the economy of North Vietnam.

No less relevant, the United States had reacted forcefully in response to North Vietnamese aggression. The resumption of the bombing campaign in April had devastated the transportation and communications infrastructure in North Vietnam. Perhaps most ominously, in December of the same year, the United States had executed a brilliant strategic air

²³⁹ Ibid.

campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong. By the end of December, the intricate anti-aircraft network in the Red River Delta had been neutralized by the Americans (notwithstanding different claims from writers such as Gabriel Kolko²⁴⁰). By any objective analysis, Hanoi's military objectives had been thwarted by January of 1973.

The "moderates" in the Politburo now began to mobilize their colleagues to support the conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks. Powerful members of the Politburo, such as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Pham Van Dong, and even junior Politburo members, such as Nguyen Van Linh, now realized that acceptance of the terms offered by Washington was in Hanoi's interests. There would be no military advantage in refusing to conclude the Paris Peace Talks and the Democratic Republic desperately needed to rebuild its shattered infrastructure. Instead, by focusing on "socialist construction" of the economy, the Democratic Republic would be in an enhanced position for the final showdown with the Republic of Vietnam.

Yet, the "moderates" within the Politburo may have failed to build the needed consensus if it had not been for support from senior officers of the PAVN. Clearly, serious organizational, command and control and logistical problems had plagued the North Vietnamese offensive in the South. Further time was needed for the PAVN to transform itself into

²⁴⁰ Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.426.

a mechanized juggernaut on the model of the armies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Senior General Giap was revered by junior officers as a revolutionary hero and the victor of Dien Bien Phu, but by 1972, he was perhaps considered an anachronism. The dramatic decline in Giap's influence in both the military and Party after the summer of 1972, along with his poor health, probably isolated the remaining "hawks" in the Politburo.

A new generation of military men now emerged after the disastrous outcome of the Nguyen Hue Offensive. Giap was eclipsed in the Politburo by another military man, Senior General Van Tien Dung, PAVN Chief of Staff.²⁴¹ Although Dung himself was an "old revolutionary"--he had commanded the 340th Viet Minh Division at Dien Bien Phu, he shared the professional aspirations of younger men, such as Lieutenant Generals Huang Cam , Le Duc Anh, and Dong Sy Nguyen. For these generals, the re-unification of Vietnam would not be achieved by a reliance on Maoist guerrilla doctrine, but rather, the principles of Soviet mechanized warfare.²⁴² Thus, for the senior leadership of the PAVN, the influence of the Chinese "Yanan School" of revolutionary warfare would be eclipsed by the Soviet "Frunze School" of mechanized warfare, as demonstrated by the brilliantly planned

²⁴¹ Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace ,p.42

²⁴² Ian Beckett, The March of Communism-1917 to 1984, p.134.

and executed offensives of 1975 and 1978, against South Vietnam and Kampuchea, respectively. The most important thing required by the PAVN at this period was time. Only with time could the military recover from its losses in 1972 and prepare the Soviet-style mechanized force that would reunify the nation.

By January of 1973, a consensus had been forged within both the powerful Politburo and the senior leadership of the PAVN. North Vietnam had suffered a very serious military setback, a fact that could not be ignored. The country now had to focus on rebuilding the economy and re-organizing the army for the imminent confrontation with South Vietnam. The remaining "hawks," notably First Secretary Le Duan, could no longer resist the will of their colleagues in the Politburo.

Domestic concerns were clearly a consideration in Hanoi's decision to accept the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973. Yet, the influence of the second catalyst identified in the introduction also affected the decision-making in the Nixon Administration. In the memoirs of all of the senior officials of the Nixon Presidency, notably the President himself and his National Security Advisor, the importance of concluding the Paris Peace Talks in the first term of the Administration was recognized. Dr. Melvin Small has concluded that ultimately President Nixon was able to neutralize the influence of the anti-war movement by his "Silent Majority" strategy, which involved a direct appeal by the President to the American

people over the heads of academics and journalists, along with his successful diplomacy with China and the Soviet Union. In addition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation(FBI), headed by its controversial Director, J.Edgar Hoover(1924-1972), conducted a vigorous campaign against the principal anti-war organizations, along with prominent anti-war activists who ranged from Stokely Carmichael to John Lennon. Yet, twenty-two years after Mr. Hoover's death, the effectiveness of the FBI's campaign to neutralize the anti--war movement remains nebulous. However, Nixon was only too well aware that support for his policies in Indochina was at best tenuous. Small has noted:

The Silent Majority speech and the offensives against the movement on several fronts did not give him a free hand, although they did buy him "a lot of time and a lot of room." The population had rallied around his perceived moderate policies. Most Americans, even congressional and media leaders, accepted Vietnamization, the continuation of peace talks, and especially the staged withdrawals of American troops...Nonetheless, both he and the North Vietnamese knew that the moderate policy supported by most citizens would lead ultimately to a total American withdrawal...²⁴³

Thus, President Nixon did not have a free hand to escalate the war as he saw fit as demonstrated by the massive protests that erupted in response to the "Christmas Bombings" of 1972. Nixon had clearly miscalculated his support in the country when he ordered the controversial bombings to be executed. The anti-war protests that resulted from Operation Linebacker

²⁴³ Melvin Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves ,p.191

II weakened Nixon's political support, particularly in the Congress, and intensified the Administration's need for a settlement.

The role of the final catalyst, third party intervention/the international balance of power, was previously addressed in the preceding chapter. A determining factor in the Politburo's decision to fundamentally alter its negotiating position in October of 1972 was Nixon's "triangular diplomacy." Hanoi had become isolated from its two principal allies. Continued Chinese and Soviet support for the war in Vietnam could no longer be assured. This fact was obvious from the dramatic summits that President Nixon held with Mao and Brezhnev in February and May of 1972, respectively, and the failure of either China or the Soviet Union to offer to clear Haiphong after May 8, 1972. The senior leadership of both the Lao Dong Party and the PAVN certainly concluded that it was in the DRV's interests to conclude the Paris Peace Talks because of the Chinese and Soviet desire to see the war in South-East Asia come to an end.

Along with addressing the two hypotheses raised in the introduction, this chapter has examined the four inter-related questions also posed in the introduction. By reference to the three catalysts, the four questions are substantially addressed. An in-depth analysis of the hypotheses and questions raised in the first chapter will be presented in the

conclusion.

PART V: NOW THE BATTLE IS OVER

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSIONS

The analytical framework introduced in the first chapter provides a basic analytical tool with which to examine the dynamics of the Paris Peace Talks, and to a lesser extent, the Second Vietnam War itself. By reference to the three catalysts, the first hypothesis raised in the introduction, that only a substantial shift in the negotiating position of the Politburo in Hanoi allowed the Paris Peace Talks to be concluded, is effectively addressed. All the evidence clearly indicates that this hypothesis is valid. On May 2, 1972, the "Special Advisor" to the North Vietnamese Paris Peace Talks delegation, Le Duc Tho, rejected the peace proposal put forward by the American National Security Advisor. Yet, barely five months later, Le Duc Tho accepted the same offer. To understand the factors that led the North Vietnamese Politburo to radically alter its negotiating strategy in October of 1972, by accepting an American peace proposal, which it can be argued it could have obtained in 1969 with vigorous diplomacy, it is necessary to refer to the catalysts.

The single greatest change that had occurred by October of 1972 was that the DRV had suffered a serious military

reversal. Ever since the beginning of the Paris Peace Talks in November of 1968, neither the senior leadership of the Lao Dong Party nor the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) doubted that eventually North Vietnam would defeat South Vietnam. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was considered a "puppet army" not only by Hanoi, but also by many Western commentators. After November of 1968, North Vietnam was biding its time. The strong anti-war sentiment in the United States guaranteed that the winner of the 1968 Presidential election would be forced to continue President Johnson's policy of deescalation. Thus, as American troop withdrawals picked up momentum, Hanoi recognized that it would only be a matter of time before the ARVN faced the PAVN without American ground troops in Vietnam. In addition, as Hanoi waited for American troop withdrawals to pick up pace, it was also given valuable time in which to replenish the ranks of the PAVN that had been diminished through the heavy casualties sustained during Tet-1968.

Therefore, the first two "historical snapshots" which were isolated - the Tet Offensive of 1968 and the decision of the Johnson Administration to begin deescalation of the war in March of 1968, are critical to understanding the dynamics of the Paris Peace Talks which followed. The ability of the North Vietnamese to launch a country-wide offensive clearly indicated to the American people that the conflict in Vietnam could continue indefinitely. Public support for the war, which

was in decline prior to Tet of 1968, now collapsed. The dramatic announcement made by President Johnson on March 31, 1968 was a direct result of the Tet Offensive. In turn, the President's national television address was the genesis of the Paris Peace Talks. However, the results of the Tet Offensive also influenced the North Vietnamese Politburo's decision to enter into the Paris Peace Talks. Both the PAVN and the VC had suffered crippling casualties and time was desperately needed to make good these losses.

Therefore, the North Vietnamese decision to enter into the Paris Peace Talks was motivated by the tactical military reversal suffered during Tet and the need for Operation Rolling Thunder to be brought to an end. Yet, by entering into the Paris Peace Talks, the Politburo in Hanoi never gave up its ultimate goals--the reunification of Vietnam and the establishment of Vietnamese hegemony over Indochina. Ultimately, the ARVN would have to face the PAVN alone. The shaky performance of the ARVN during Lam Son 719 in February-March of 1971 only strengthened the impression in Hanoi that the South Vietnamese military was "a puppet."

The second catalyst identified in the introduction, the threat of domestic instability, was also a factor for both Washington and Hanoi in the eventual conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. Most of the literature focuses on the role of the anti-war movement in the United States. Although the strong anti-war sentiment was a leading factor in the

decision of President Johnson to begin deescalation of the conflict in March of 1968 and President Nixon's determination to extricate the United States from the conflict in South-East Asia, its importance must not be overestimated. As noted by Small, the anti-war movement lost momentum and influence after the spring of 1970.²⁴⁴ Thus, President Nixon's three-tiered policy for dealing with the anti-war movement- the "Silent Majority" Strategy, Great Power diplomacy, and increased activity by the FBI against prominent anti-war leaders- was ultimately effective in giving the Administration both the time and the manoeuver room needed to execute its policy in Indochina.

Yet, in no sense did Nixon's "neutralization" of the anti-war movement after June of 1970 mean that the Administration had "carte blanche" in its policy. The strong anti-war sentiment and general war-weariness in the United States acted as a powerful restriction on the Administration's Indochina policy, particularly the ability to escalate the conflict by the use of American ground troops after the Cambodian operation. Although President Nixon may have felt utter contempt towards the anti-war movement, he could not ignore its influence in the media and the Congress. A consummate politician, Richard Nixon realized that his support in the country was dependent upon deescalation as symbolized by the troop withdrawals and Vietnamization. The war had to

²⁴⁴ Melvin Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p.193.

be brought to an end and, ultimately, it may be argued, this consideration became paramount for the Nixon Administration. Thus, there is also substantial evidence to support the second hypothesis raised in the introduction.

Most of the literature on the Second Vietnam War fails to address the importance of the second catalyst for Hanoi, however. Although the importance of the second catalyst would obviously be greater on Washington than Hanoi, the Democratic Republic was not immune from domestic concerns. Even in the left-of-centre accounts which tend to be more sympathetic to Hanoi and which might be expected to be more informed about its domestic situation, such as Gabriel Kolko's Anatomy of a War and Gareth Porter's A Peace Denied, there was found to be a common recurring fallacy: the DRV was portrayed as a monolith. Even in Gabriel Kolko's very well researched work, terms such as the "party" and the "revolution" are found throughout the text. Thus, the Politburo in Hanoi was inferred to be a united monolithic decision-making body with a single over-riding objective :the reunification of Vietnam.

Yet, this analysis is far too simplistic. In order to address the first, second and fourth questions raised in the introduction- What were the factors that led the respective parties to enter into the Paris Peace Talks in 1968, and subsequently, to conclude the Paris Peace Accords in 1973?, Why did the Paris Peace Talks drag on for so long ?, and, Why did Hanoi accept a peace settlement that was not entirely in

its interests?, it is necessary to understand the nature of the Politburo of the Lao Dong Party. In almost all of the literature on Communist states, there was a consensus that the ruling parties were seriously divided over priorities. The same was true for the Lao Dong Party during the Second Vietnam War. The North Vietnamese Communist Party had two critical goals that were vital to maintaining its legitimacy, both domestically and internationally: "socialist construction" of the DRV, and of course, the reunification of Vietnam. Although these two priorities were in many respects complimentary to one another, critical divisions emerged within the North Vietnamese Central Committee over which one should take priority and the best way to achieve each objective. As a direct result, at least three factions emerged within the Politburo.

The first faction, referred to as the "hawks" by the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA)²⁴⁵, was most closely identified with the First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party, Le Duan. This faction also included the Chairman of the Party's Organization Department, Le Duc Tho, the Chairman of the Central Office for South Vietnam(COSVN), Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh up to his mysterious death in July of 1967, and his successor, Pham Hung. The second faction identified by the CIA was most closely associated with the senior theorist of the Lao Dong Party, Truong Chinh. This faction-the "doves"-

²⁴⁵ Lipsman and Doyle, The North, p.30.

argued that South Vietnam could not possibly be liberated until the DRV had built up a strong economy. Yet, from the extant evidence available, the balance in the Central Committee was determined by a third faction--the "neutrals." This faction was most closely identified with the Chairman of the Democratic Republic, Ho Chi Minh. After Ho's death on September 3, 1969, this faction became dominated by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Pham Van Dong. The "neutrals," which also included the Foreign Minister of the DRV, Nguyen Duy Trinh, and possibly the Chief of Staff of the PAVN, Senior General Van Tien Dung, tended to be far more pragmatic than the two other more dogmatic factions. For these powerful members of the Politburo, the priorities of the DRV had to be dictated by circumstances, not iron-clad dogma.

The single greatest determinant for the "neutrals" regarding the ultimate objective of reunification was the situation on the battlefield. As long as victory still appeared possible in the immediate future, men such as Pham Van Dong and Nguyen Duy Trinh accepted the aggressive policy of the "hawks." Yet, when the battlefield situation turned against the DRV, the "neutrals" supported the more moderate policy of the "doves." In both March of 1968 and September of 1972, the "neutrals" recognized that the DRV had suffered a critical military reversal and were willing to support the beginning of the Paris Peace Talks and the conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords, respectively.

The third catalyst introduced in the first chapter, the role of third parties/the international balance of power, is also crucial in understanding the dynamics of the Paris Peace Talks. As was discussed in the third chapter, the threat of either Chinese or Soviet military intervention was a decisive influence on the Johnson Administration's decision to begin deescalation of the war in March of 1968. The role of third parties would also play a critical role in the North Vietnamese Politburo's decision to accept the Paris Peace Accords.

By 1972, the dramatic transition in the international balance of power, which had been underway since at least 1959, was obvious to the general public. The two dramatic summits held by President Nixon with Mao and Brezhnev in February and May of 1972 respectively clearly evinced the shift in the international balance of power. Super power *détente* and Sino-American rapprochement would act as a powerful impetus for the Politburo in Hanoi to risk the great military gamble of the Nguyen Hue Offensive and once it failed, to conclude the Paris Peace Accords.

The members of the North Vietnamese Politburo recognized that there were fundamental differences between Moscow and Beijing. China's and the Soviet Union's ability and willingness to assist the Vietnamese Revolution were ultimately determined by the relative balance of ideological commitments and national interests. Senior leaders of both

the Lao Dong Party and the PAVN realized that improved relations with the United States was a priority for both Moscow and Beijing. Ultimately, the benefits that both Moscow and Beijing could hope to gain from a new relationship with the United States would greatly outweigh the advantages that could be gained by supporting the DRV in South-East Asia. The senior leaders of the DRV were only too well aware that China and the Soviet Union would not risk the new relationship with Washington in favour of the Vietnamese Revolution.

Yet, in the best accounts of the "triangular diplomacy," the memoirs of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, there is an inference that Moscow and Beijing "abandoned " the DRV in 1972. Although both of the Communist giants wanted the conflict in South-East Asia brought to an end regardless of the views of Hanoi, the senior leaders of the Lao Dong Party were able to successfully manipulate the fundamental dichotomy in Communist foreign policy to their advantage. National interests dictated that China and the Soviet Union wanted to improve relations with the United States and to facilitate an end to the conflict in Vietnam. However, ideological commitments dictated that China and the Soviet Union had to support the Vietnamese Revolution.

Both China and the Soviet Union claimed to be the true leader of international socialism. Thus, both countries were required to support "wars of national liberation" against imperialism. Under the astute leadership of senior theorist

Truong Chinh, the Lao Dong Party had argued that it was the "world revolution's front line."²⁴⁶ As noted by Gabriel Kolko, Vietnam had become the symbol of the world socialist movement by 1972, having defeated first French imperialism in 1954 and then having fought American imperialism to a stand-still.²⁴⁷ Thus, the DRV could claim special legitimacy in the world socialist movement. This was a political fact that could not be ignored by the senior leadership in either Moscow or Beijing. Because of the ideological premises of both the revolutions of 1917 and 1949, neither of the Communist giants could be seen to be "abandoning" the DRV. The leadership of the Lao Dong Party recognized this reality and thus, even as Moscow and Beijing applied diplomatic pressure on Hanoi to settle the Paris Peace Talks, the DRV was able to obtain commitments of massive amounts of Soviet and Chinese military and economic aid. After reading the memoirs of President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger, especially their analyses of why the Paris Peace Accords failed, one is left with the impression that neither brilliant statesman fully understood the relevance of Chinese and Soviet ideological commitments to the DRV.

The analytical framework introduced in the first chapter provides a basic reference to understand the dynamics of the Paris Peace Talks. For almost fifty-one months, the delegates

²⁴⁶ Gabriel Kolko, Anatomy of a War, p.407.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

from the United States, South Vietnam, the DRV, and the National Liberation Front, engaged in often futile negotiations. The primary obstacle to a resolution of the Paris Peace Talks was the intransigent negotiating strategy of Hanoi. As long as the leadership in Hanoi believed that the conflict could be settled militarily, it would be unwilling to accept a negotiated settlement. Yet, this position was logical. As long as the Nixon Administration continued to gradually withdraw troops, Hanoi realized that it was only a matter of time until the PAVN faced the ARVN alone. Hanoi's assessment was further buttressed by doubts about the effectiveness of Vietnamization and the ability of President Nixon to drastically reescalate the conflict because of domestic anti-war sentiment. Only when Hanoi's Nguyen Hue Offensive had been decisively defeated by American airpower and steadfast resistance from the ARVN would the Politburo of the Lao Dong Party decide upon a fundamental shift in the negotiating position of the DRV.

The Paris Peace Accords were concluded more than twenty-one years ago. Yet, the successful resolution of the Paris Peace Talks remains one of the greatest diplomatic achievements for any American president since the end of the Korean War. When Richard Nixon entered the White House in January of 1969, his administration faced the most complicated foreign policy disaster for the United States in this century. The ability of the Nixon Administration to successfully

conclude a "peace with honour," which not only extricated the United States from Vietnam but also provided South Vietnam with at least a chance for survival, ranks as one of the greatest foreign policy achievements of Mr. Nixon's presidency. The fact that the Paris Peace Accords collapsed and South Vietnam eventually fell to the Communists in no way discredits the diplomatic success of the Nixon Administration. The Paris Peace Accords failed because of two interconnected developments that few could have foreseen in January of 1973: Watergate and a violently anti-war Congress. The question of whether South Vietnam could have survived if it had not been for the above two developments will never be known.

PART VI: EPILOGUE

CHAPTER IX: FAILURE OF THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS

On April 30, 1975, Saigon fell to the People's Army of Vietnam's (PAVN) Ho Chi Minh Offensive; the next day, the last President of the Republic of Vietnam, Duong Van Minh, ordered the armed forces of the republic to cease all resistance. The fall of Saigon was symbolic in many respects of the brief history of the Paris Peace Accords. There was great optimism when the Accords were signed on January 27, 1973. However, both the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese refused to abide by the Accords from the start. South Vietnam's strategic position would gradually deteriorate after January of 1973. The purposes of this chapter are, first, by reference to the three catalysts identified in the introduction to briefly analyze the underlying reasons for the collapse of South Vietnam, and second, to provide conclusions on the Paris Peace Talks in relation to the analytical framework presented in chapter one.

A Brief Analysis of the Failure of the Paris Peace Accords

To understand why the Paris Peace Accords failed, it is first necessary to provide an outline of the Accords and the vital mechanisms established to enforce them. The Paris Peace Accords, or Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam²⁴⁸, were composed of twenty-three articles, divided into nine chapters, as follows:

Article 1

It recognized the "independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity" of Vietnam as defined by the Geneva Accords.²⁴⁹

Articles 2 to 7

They involved the cease-fire and American withdrawal. Importantly, North Vietnamese infiltration was supposed to come to a halt.

Article 8

It involved the return of all American Prisoners of War(POWs).

Articles 9 to 14

The political settlement yet to be reached by Hanoi and Saigon.

Article 15

Respect for the Demilitarized Zone(DMZ).

Articles 16 to 19

In many respects the most important part of the Accords,

²⁴⁸ Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace, p.106.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p.112.

it established mechanisms to enforce the agreement. The International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS), consisting of delegates from Poland, Hungary, Canada, and Indonesia, along with the Joint Military Commission, composed of delegates from the ARVN, the PAVN, and the Viet Cong, was designed to enforce the Accords when the parties involved had disputes.²⁵⁰

Article 20

Reiterated the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords with respect to Laos and Cambodia.

Articles 21 and 22

The former called on the United States to provide aid in "healing the wounds of war" by contributing to "post-war construction of North Vietnam and throughout Indochina." With this aid serving as a foundation, Article 22 urged the United States and DRV to establish "a new, equal, and mutually beneficial relationship."²⁵¹

Therefore, the Paris Peace Accords were far from perfect. The PAVN remained on the sovereign territory of South Vietnam and there were still no cease-fires in Cambodia and Laos. Yet, the prospects for South Vietnam were far from bleak in January of 1973. In a recently declassified memo sent to President Nixon in 1973, the last American Ambassador to

²⁵⁰ Edward Doyle, Fall of the South, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985), p.47.

²⁵¹ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.165.

Saigon, Graham Martin, declared: "...we have every right to confidently expect that the GVN can hold without the necessity of U.S. armed intervention."²⁵²

Graham Martin's optimism was well founded. In January of 1973, the military balance favoured South Vietnam, at least on paper. The ARVN had a field strength of 450,000 men, organized into thirteen divisions. The Enhance and Enhance Plus programmes had re-armed South Vietnam: 550 M-48 medium tanks and M-41 light tanks, 1,200 M-113 armoured personnel carriers and 1,330 105 mm and 155 mm howitzers. In addition, Regional Forces and Popular Forces had a total strength of 525,000 men. The PAVN's combat strength in South Vietnam had been reduced to about 148,000 troops organized into thirteen understrength divisions and 26 independent regiments. Perhaps most importantly, the South Vietnamese, on paper, enjoyed air superiority.

Ambassador Martin's positive assessment was buttressed by the performance of the ARVN during the PAVN's Nguyen Hue Offensive. The ARVN had stood up to the strongest PAVN offensive to date in an excellent manner. Morale in the army was very high,²⁵³ and the senior generals of the ARVN had proven their competence in combat. In addition, President Nixon had given his word that if Hanoi violated the Accords,

²⁵² Ibid, p.193.

²⁵³ Ibid, p.187.

the United States would react.²⁵⁴ Nixon had kept his word in July of 1973 when the North Vietnamese attacked Hon Ngu (in the Mekong Delta) by authorizing repeated B-52 strikes.

Throughout 1973, South Vietnam's position looked promising. The ARVN was on the offensive and the PAVN was in a difficult position. The number of combat personnel in the PAVN had fallen 25 percent by the summer of 1973.²⁵⁵ Attempts to rebuild the Viet Cong infrastructure were very unsuccessful.²⁵⁶ Senior General Van Tien Dung, Chief of Staff of the PAVN, would declare in October of 1973 that North Vietnam faced a "critical situation."²⁵⁷ Military reverses in the South, such as the destruction of the 1st PAVN Division in the Battle of the Seven Mountains, were exacerbated by a very weak economy and critical divisions in the Politburo. In the summer of 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were holding, however imperfectly, and the chances for South Vietnam's survival appeared to be good.

However, within 16 months, South Vietnam would no longer exist as a sovereign state. The PAVN's Ho Chi Minh Offensive would conquer South Vietnam in a mere two months in the spring of 1975. Military Regions 1 and 2 would fall almost without a fight! In many respects, the fall of South Vietnam in 1975

²⁵⁴ Palmer, The 25 Year War, p.202.

²⁵⁵ Lipsman and Weiss, The False Peace, p.109.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

was similar to the fall of France in 1940.

How could the Paris Peace Accords and thus South Vietnam, have collapsed completely within such a short period of time, especially when things were looking so promising in 1973? There are several factors: American domestic politics, a massive PAVN build-up, and disastrous strategic and tactical blunders by the South Vietnamese High Command. The remainder of this section will explore the roles of military blunders by the South Vietnamese and American domestic politics in contributing to the final collapse of South Vietnam in 1975.

Thus, the final collapse of South Vietnam will be analyzed by reference to the three catalysts introduced in the introduction.

(a) The Balance of Forces in South Vietnam- 1973 to 1975

An objective military analysis clearly indicates that primary factors in South Vietnam's collapse were a massive PAVN build-up in late 1973-1974 and a series of disastrous strategic and tactical errors by South Vietnamese generals. Thus, an argument can be put forward that the fall of South Vietnam was not a foregone conclusion even after the reduction of American aid. Instead, a strategy of duplicity on the part of President Thieu and his senior generals would destroy South Vietnam in 1975.

Immediately after the Accords were signed on January 27, 1973, the North Vietnamese engaged in a huge build-up that

would climax in the spring of 1974.²⁵⁸ By January of 1974, between 75,000 and 80,000 troops had been infiltrated into South Vietnam.²⁵⁹ Yet, this development was not critical: the infiltrations only brought PAVN strength up to its 1972 level. More ominous were the dramatic improvements in North Vietnamese logistics and anti-aircraft defenses in occupied South Vietnam. Equally important, Senior General Dung had re-established a general strategic reserve in the North of seven divisions.²⁶⁰ By early 1974, Dung had finished re-equipping and refurbishing his forces in the South. However, as noted earlier, he remained pessimistic.

General Dung's pessimism would be alleviated by the stupidity of the South Vietnamese High Command. Thieu faced two serious strategic problems: the complete absence of a strategic reserve and seriously overextended lines-of-communication. The North Vietnamese enjoyed the strategic initiative as a result. The PAVN forces could mass at isolated locations and enjoy massive local superiority, especially in the Central Highlands. Thieu really had only one option: truncation. South Vietnamese forces should have been withdrawn from Quang Tri province and the interior of the Central Highlands so that a strategic reserve could have been re-established. Such a move, advocated by high-ranking South

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p.117.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Vietnamese generals,²⁶¹ would have caused political problems but there was no option. Thus, the first catalyst introduced in chapter one was clearly in favour of Hanoi by December of 1974.

(b) Collapse of American Support

Critics of the South Vietnamese regime alleged that its collapse in 1975 was proof that it was completely dependent on American support to survive. Obviously, the reduction of American aid was a critical factor in South Vietnam's collapse. However, the reduction of American aid compounded South Vietnam's strategic problems that were exacerbated by a series of disastrous blunders in 1975. No one factor can be studied in isolation from the others.

Richard Nixon clearly blames Congress for South Vietnam's fall:

When the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973, a balance of power existed in Indochina. South Vietnam was secured within the cease-fire lines...But United States power was the linchpin holding the peace agreement together...and without adequate American military and economic assistance, South Vietnam would lack the power to turn back yet another such invasion. Congress proceeded to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.²⁶²

Nixon's assessment is essentially correct, but he should not underestimate the devastating effect of Watergate. At the

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Nixon, No More Vietnams, p.167.

most critical hour, the American Presidency was emasculated! In August of 1973, Congress cut-off all funds for military operations in Indochina. Nixon's control over the military was reduced by the War Powers Act of October, 1973. Thus, the United States was "shooting itself in the foot" at the same time that Senior General General Dung was apprehensive about the future.

The most damaging blow inflicted by Congress was reduction of economic assistance to South Vietnam. For Fiscal Year 1975, Congress only authorized a budget ceiling of \$700 million when the Administration was seeking no less than \$1.126 billion.²⁶³ These serious budget restrictions would force President Thieu to drastically reduce supplies for the military. Stocks of ammunition totalling 177,000 tons in January of 1973 had fallen to 121,000 tons in May of 1974. By April of 1975, South Vietnam only had adequate ammunition for the M-102 howitzer for fifty-two days of light fighting.²⁶⁴ Over half of the air force was grounded due to a lack of fuel and spare parts; only 55 percent of all motor vehicles were still on the road by April of 1975. The ARVN had lost its firepower and mobility.

At the same time that South Vietnam was being starved of aid, North Vietnam was the recipient of Chinese and Soviet largesse. In 1973, Hanoi imported 2.8 million metric tons,

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

while in 1974 it imported 3.5 million metric tons.²⁶⁵ Interestingly, the Communist giants lost any desire to restrain North Vietnam, as in 1972, only after the United States lost the will to do so. A devastating psychological blow fell on Saigon on August 8, 1974: Richard Nixon resigned from the Oval Office under threat of impeachment. The tragedy was now ready to enter the final act. Thus, the role of domestic politics in the United States and of third parties would play a critical part in South Vietnam's fall.

South Vietnam was in a serious position by early 1975. Yet, its final collapse was in no way assured. A series of critical blunders would lead to final defeat. The beginning of the end for South Vietnam began in December of 1974 when the Ninth Plenary of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party convened in Hanoi. The Chairman of the Central Office for South Vietnam, Pham Hung, had been convinced by his senior military commander, Lieutenant-General Tran Van Tra, to propose to the Politburo the execution of a large-scale offensive against ARVN positions in the province of Phuoc Long.²⁶⁶

In retrospect, it is now clear that Pham Hung was risking his considerable prestige in backing Lieutenant-General Tra's bold plan. From the extant evidence available, Tra appears to have been considered a maverick by the senior leadership of

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Lipsman and Doyle, The Fall of the South, p.31

the PAVN, and to a lesser extent, the Lao Dong Party. He had been the ranking officer in COSVN since the death of Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh in July of 1967. In this role, he had been responsible for the massive assaults on Saigon in 1968 and 1972, which had failed disastrously with very heavy casualties. The fact that Tra was not in favour with the senior leadership in Hanoi seems to be indicated by his failure to be elevated to the powerful Politburo. Thus, when Pham Hung championed a plan put forward by Tra, his colleagues in the Politburo were undoubtedly sceptical.

Yet, the offensive devised by Tra was very bold and its potential ramifications went far beyond Phuoc Long province. As already discussed, the ARVN was stretched to the breaking point by late 1974-early 1975. Tra considered a large-scale offensive in Phuoc Long province to be a critical test of two factors: the ability of the ARVN Joint General Staff to reinforce isolated regions of South Vietnam, and second, the reaction of the United States to clear cut North Vietnamese aggression.

In the first week of January, 1975, Pham Hung finally won approval for the offensive in Phuoc Long province. However, the offensive was only to be executed with available forces from the COSVN reserve. Also, the Politburo issued a dire warning that the attack "had to succeed at all costs."²⁶⁷ This ominous, rather bizarre declaration infers critical

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

divisions within the Politburo. Quite possibly, if the offensive was a failure, the Politburo would have demoted Pham Hung and Tran Van Tra. Nonetheless, Lieutenant-General Tra realized that a "do-or-die" situation was now at hand. His deputy, Lieutenant-General Tran Do, would be responsible for executing the attack with three divisions, the 5th and 9th VC and the 7th PAVN.

On January 6, the capital of Phuoc Long province, Phuoc Binh, garrisoned by only a handful of Regional Force battalions, was struck by a devastating multi-divisional Communist assault. If the capital was to be recaptured, substantial reinforcements would have to be committed by the Joint General Staff in Saigon. The decision on whether or not to reinforce Phuoc Long province was the responsibility of the ARVN Military Region 3 commander, Lieutenant-General Le Nguyen Khang.²⁶⁸ After studying his situation maps and the ARVN's order-of-forces in Military Region 3, Khang realized that the situation was hopeless. Lieutenant-General Khang's primary responsibility was the defence of Saigon. If valuable forces were to be committed to the battle in Phuoc Long province, they would have to come from Saigon's defensive perimeter. The depleting of the forces defending Saigon was a decision that neither Khang nor his superiors was willing to take.

The fall of Phuoc Long and its capital, Phuoc Binh, had

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

ramifications that were out of all proportion to the tactical victory itself. Since January, 1973, President Thieu of South Vietnam had declared that he would never cede sovereign territory to the Communists. The fall of Phuoc Long, the first province of South Vietnam to ever be captured by the Communists, clearly revealed that Thieu's policy was bankrupt. The South Vietnamese military was stretched as taut as a violin wire. Both the Politburo and the senior leadership of the PAVN now became convinced that one decisive blow would lead to the collapse of the Saigon regime. This strategic analysis was buttressed by the reaction of the United States to the PAVN offensive in Phuoc Long province. The reaction of the Ford Administration(1974-1977) to clear cut North Vietnamese aggression was timid at best. In stark contrast to the decisiveness of the Nixon Administration, the only action taken by President Gerald Ford was to lodge diplomatic protests with the ICCS, along with Moscow and Beijing. The weak nature of the American response could not have been lost on Hanoi. Perhaps most surprising, Washington did not even divert a carrier battle group, centred around the USS Enterprise(CVN-65), which had recently left Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines, to the region. Obviously, the senior leadership in Hanoi must have concluded that a " window of opportunity" now presented itself. In mid-January, Senior General Dung was given authorization by the Politburo to execute a corps-sized offensive against South Vietnamese

Military Region 2. The events that followed in March and April would utterly surprise even the most optimistic members of the Politburo in Hanoi, not to mention the Ford Administration in Washington.

In March of 1975, the ARVN Military Region II commander, Major-General Pham Van Phu would make a series of errors, resulting in a decisive tactical defeat at Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands.²⁶⁹ The North Vietnamese were now in an excellent position to cut South Vietnam in half. A strategic crisis soon became a full scale disaster when Thieu decided to abandon Military Regions 1 and 2. By late March, the retreat had turned into a complete rout. By the middle of April, the PAVN had massed its forces for the final offensive against Saigon itself. On May 1, South Vietnam surrendered.

What is the importance of the Paris Peace Accords? There is no longer an independent South Vietnam; American foreign policy clearly failed in Indochina. Yet, these judgments fail to understand the depth of the Paris Peace Accords.

The Paris Peace Accords were, as discussed, flawed. Yet if the United States had been able to enforce the provisions of the agreement and if the South Vietnamese had not made a series of critical blunders, there is a chance that South Vietnam could have survived. Nixon and Kissinger deserve the utmost credit for successfully concluding the Accords. In 1969, the war in Vietnam was raging out of control because of

²⁶⁹ Palmer, The 25 Year War, p.179.

the errors of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Nixon's ability to "end" the war in an honourable manner and give South Vietnam at least a chance of survival was the most that could have been hoped for by any observer.

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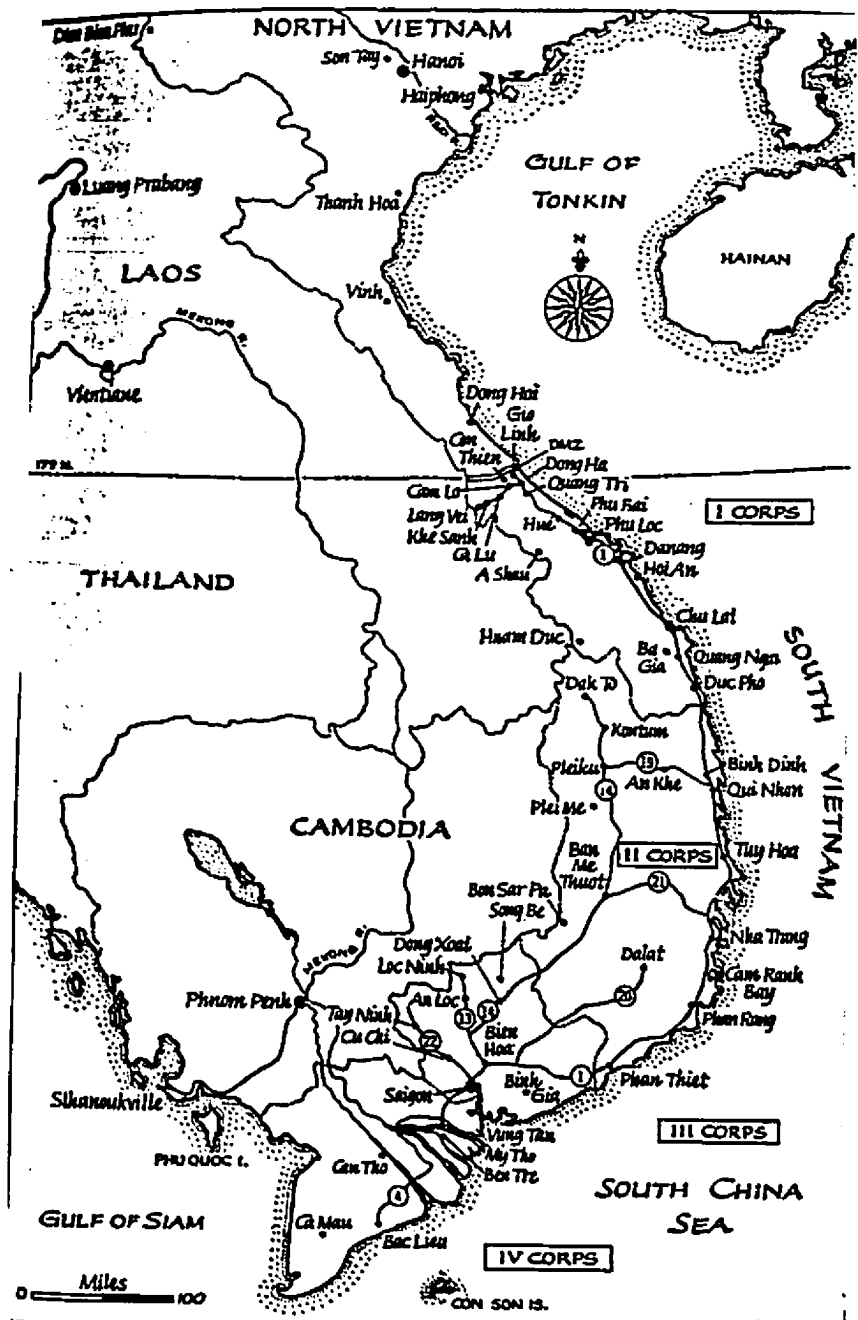
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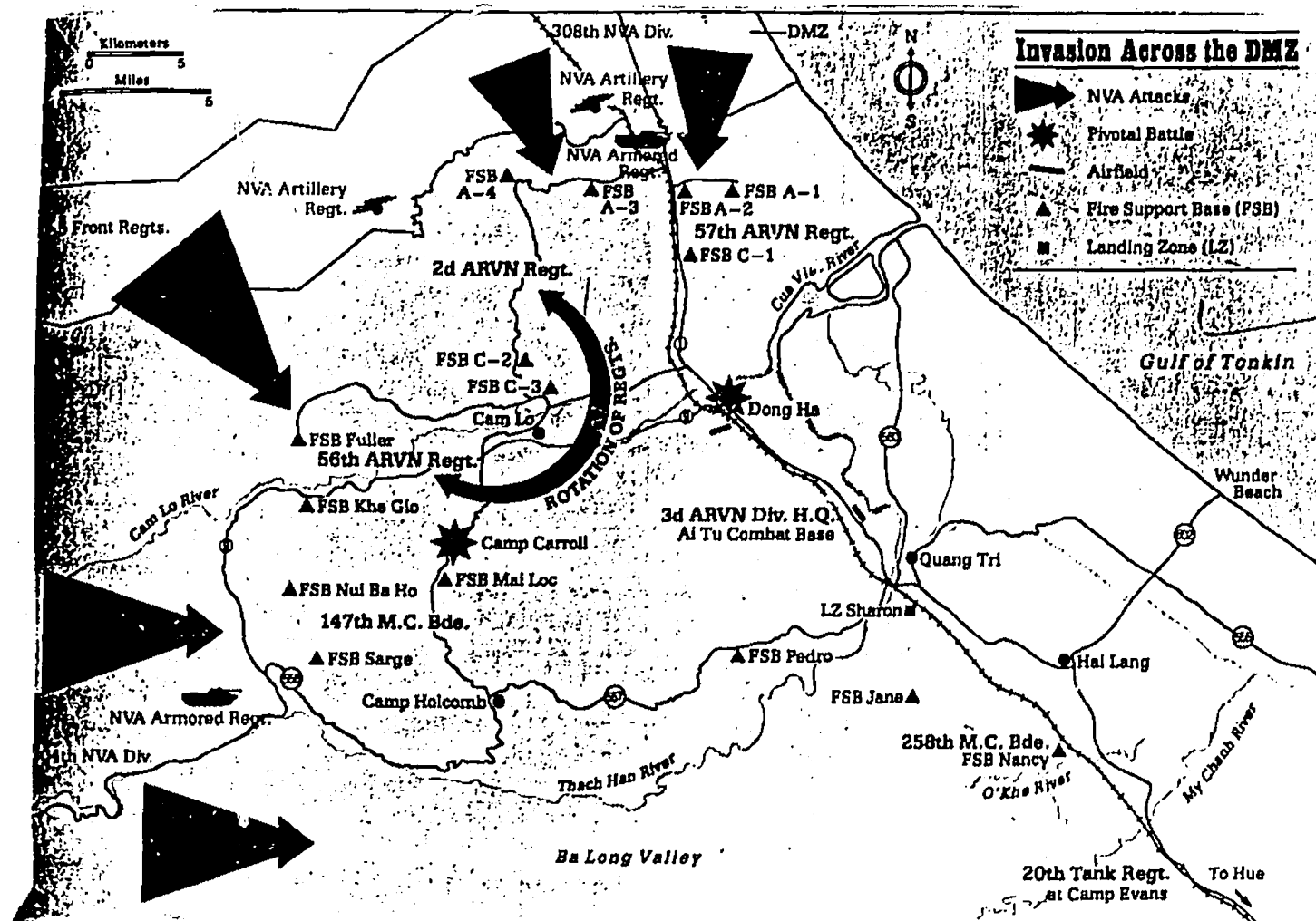
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VITA AUCTORIS

John Robert Nicholson was born in 1968 in Sydney, Nova Scotia. He graduated from Riverview Rural High School in 1988. From there he went on to Saint Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where he obtained his Bachelor of Arts (First Class Honours) in May of 1992. He is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in Political Science at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in June of 1994.

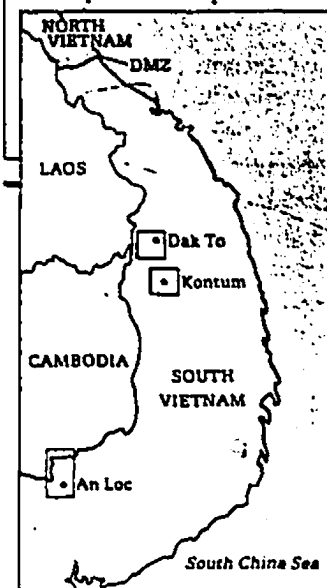
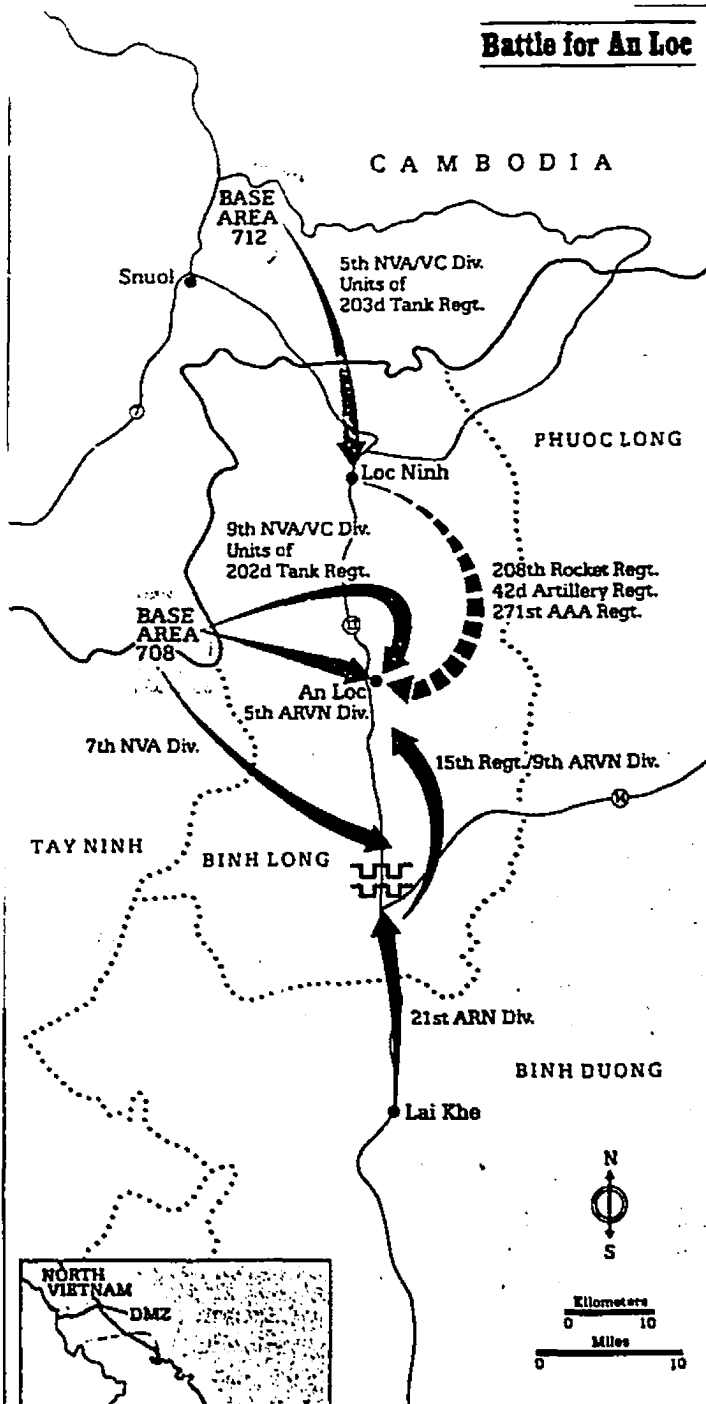




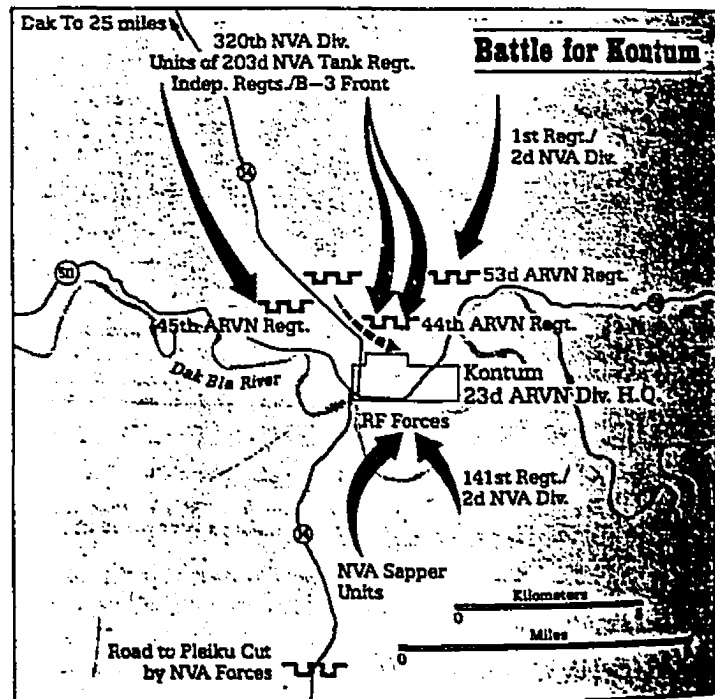
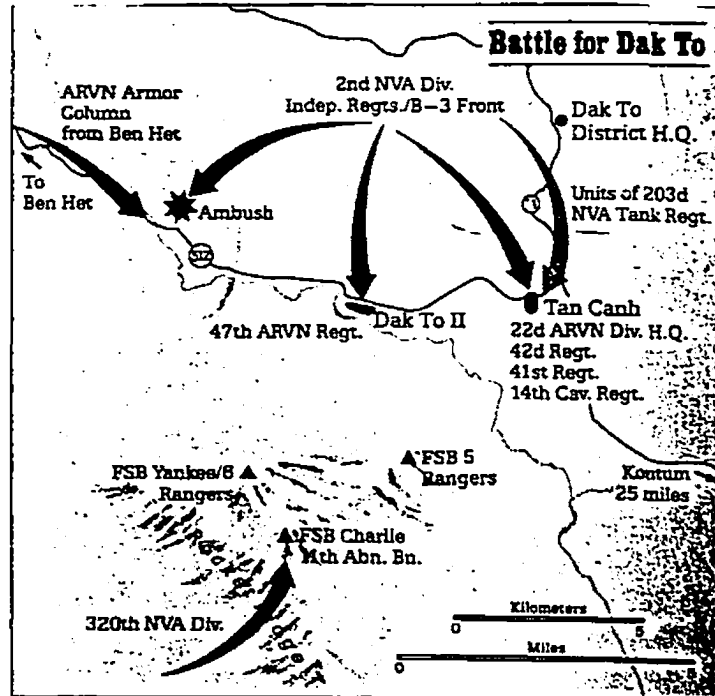
In 1972 the three regiments of the 3d ARVN Division deployed along the DMZ and two attached marine brigades manned the defenses of the western flank in Quang Tri Province. Little realizing the division faced attack by more than three NVA divisions, the 56th and 2d Regiments of the 3d Division were ordered to

exchange positions (center) on March 30. At noon that day, the Communists attacked. Disorganized and surprised by the NVA invasion, the ARVN units fell back before the tank-led northern juggernaut.

Battle for An Loc

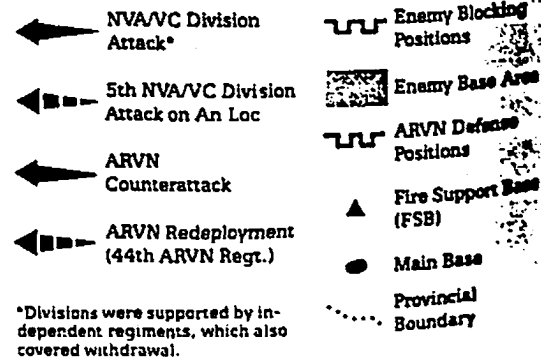


Battle for Dak To



Easter Offensive: MR 2 and 3

Following the Easter attack on Quang Tri Province, the Communists continued their offensive with strikes toward Saigon and into the central highlands. Above left. The NVA leapt out of Cambodia on April 5 with a three-division tank and artillery supported attack on Binh Long Province north of Saigon. They quickly took the town of Loc Ninh, surrounded An Loc, and cut the road to the capital. By massing their forces, however, the Communists presented U.S. aircraft with their best targets of the war and air power broke the siege. Right. The final prong of the Easter offensive struck into the central highlands on April 12. The NVA took a complex of outposts at Dak To (above) and the survivors fell back toward Kontum. Failure of the NVA to advance quickly on Kontum allowed the ARVN time to reinforce the city with the 23d Division and stop the Communists' drive.



Counterattack on Quang Tri

The recapture of Quang Tri Province began on May 13 when South Vietnamese Marines carried out a series of behind-the-lines raids around Wunder Beach. South Vietnamese forces then began a series of attacks (below right) intended first to recapture territory up to Phase Line Gold, then Brown, and finally

Blue. The attacks moved quickly until they reached Quang Tri City, which President Thieu had made the new objective of the counterattack, rather than all of Quang Tri Province. Four months after the attack began, Quang Tri City was again in ARVN hands, but the offensive had fallen short of its original objectives.

